

# **Dialogues in Poetry**

## **An Essay on Eldrid Lunden**

Unni Langås

Poetry translations by Annabelle Despard

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## Preface

The initiative behind this book comes from Pål Bjørby, Associate Professor of Scandinavian Literature at the University of Bergen, who encouraged me to write an introduction to Eldrid Lunden's poetry for an English-speaking audience. I very much appreciate Pål's enthusiastic engagement in the project, as well as his dedicated and detailed comments on the drafts. My thanks also go to Annabelle Despard, former Associate Professor of the Department of Foreign Languages and Translation at the University of Agder, and a poet herself, published both in Norwegian and English, who not only translated the poems, but also read the manuscript in different versions. I would also like to thank Reidar Ekner for his comments on the poetry translations.

*Dialogues in Poetry* is based on my Norwegian book *Dialog. Eldrid Lundens dikt 1968-2005*, Oslo, 2007. In *Dialogues in Poetry* I offer new readings with particular emphasis on key issues in Lunden's work that share a strong and critical attention to philosophical subject matters. Accordingly, the book is organized around aesthetic issues that have been central to Lunden's poetic work from the beginning. My intention is to explore the development of recurring themes – politics, places, pictures, perception, and parody – and discuss their implications and originality in relationship to influential contributions to contemporary aesthetic theory. I want to show how Lunden's work addresses issues of aesthetic, phenomenological as well as philosophical natures.

Early drafts of the book were written during a stay at the Department of Scandinavian Studies, University of Washington, Seattle, in spring 2005. I am most grateful to have been included in the devoted group of Scandinavian scholars in such a friendly way. I am especially grateful to Melissa Louise Gjellstad, now Assistant Professor of the Norwegian Program, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, who has read and commented on the whole manuscript.

Also many thanks to Marjorie Lorvik, Assistant Professor at the Department of Foreign Languages and Translation at the University of Agder, who has edited several of my English papers, including parts of this book, and to Jenny Webb at Webb Editorials, who has proofread and edited the complete manuscript.

Parts of the book have appeared in English in earlier versions. “Eldrid Lunden’s Poetry 1968-2000. An Introduction” appeared in Tuula Hökkä (ed.), *Toiset ambivalentit äänet. Essays in Feminine Poetics in Nordic Countries*, ntamo, Helsinki 2007. “Gender, Power, Poetry: The Example of Eldrid Lunden” appeared in Helena Forsås-Scott (ed.), *Gender, Power, Text. Nordic Culture in the Twentieth Century*, Norvik Press, Norwich 2004. “Perceptual Interaction. Synaesthetic Explorations in Eldrid Lunden’s Modernist Poetry” appeared in Ole Karlsen (ed.), *Krysninger. Nye perspektiver på moderne nordisk lyrikk*, Unipub, Oslo 2008.

Above all, my thanks go to the author, who wrote these wonderful poems. Annabelle and I have had a good dialogue with Eldrid Lunden, who has supported and welcomed our work.

Kristiansand, February 2010

Unni Langås

## Presentation

With her ten collections of poetry, Eldrid Lunden is a key figure in contemporary Norwegian literature. Her poetry has greatly inspired other authors and holds a prominent position in contemporary, literary history, and has received much attention from scholars and critics alike. Lunden's writings also include essays on literature as well as several introductions to a variety of literary works. She has worked as an editor for various literary journals, among them the Swedish-based *Café Existens*. As an intellectual in a central academic position, Lunden is a driving force within the literary field. Since its establishment in 1982, Lunden has served as both head of and as a professor in The Creative Writing Studies program at Telemark University College (located in Bø). This professional writing school was the first of its kind in Scandinavia, and its program has served as a model for other such endeavors. The program has proved to be influential and significant to many authors.

The aim of this critical study is to present the unique quality of Eldrid Lunden's poetry to an international audience. This following introduction will connect Lunden to major trends in Norwegian literature from the 1960s, trends to which she herself made a vital contribution, and to explore the intellectual and literary milieus surrounding her work and its reception. The remaining chapters center on key questions or topics fundamental to the understanding of Lunden's aesthetic concerns. I will offer interpretations of selected poems inspired by and saturated with an explorative attitude regarding phenomena, language, and ideas. Lunden's work is a literature oriented toward existential concerns and it is informed by voices from a national as well as an international intellectual scene. Furthermore, her poetry is firmly embedded in the subjective experiences of nature, body, and gender, and its core exists suspended in the tension between perception and voice.

## Literary Context

In 1968, the year of her literary debut, Eldrid Lunden was a student at the University of Oslo. Born in 1940 in Naustdal, Sunnfjord, she—like many other men and women of her generation—attended to one of the four Norwegian universities in order to obtain a college education. As a manifest result of the political goals of the government, Norwegian universities expanded significantly during the 1960s: state grants in the form of both loans and scholarships made it possible for everyone in principle to earn a university degree. This development is quite important from a cultural perspective both because writers *in spe* now received increased systematic training in academic disciplines and because the university became a meeting place for creative and ambitious young writers and artists. The result in terms of the contemporary cultural scene was the influx of a new generation of highly educated authors and other artists from various social and geographical backgrounds. Additionally, Norway saw a rise in the number of women with a university degree and also their growing participation in professional life. In 1973, Lunden obtained her post-graduate degree in Nordic languages and literature. Her thesis, *Kvar gjekk Nora? Individualisme og kvinnesyn i tre norske drama* [*Where did Nora go? Individualism and Concepts of Femininity in Three Norwegian Plays*], was published in Lunden's 2004 collection entitled *Kvifor måtte Nora gå?* [*Why Did Nora Have to Leave?*].

At the time Lunden arrived in Oslo, she had no firm plans to become an author, but as she became acquainted with other students and their literary interests she found herself drawn to the literary world. Lunden joined a group of young radical writers and thinkers who together published *Profil*, an important literary journal at the time. This student magazine became the central medium for aesthetic discussions among aspiring young authors, and it provided an opportunity for publication of the early attempts at fiction, criticism and the essays by emerging authors. Among its contributors and editors were the now-renowned authors Dag Solstad, Einar Økland, Espen Haavardsholm, Tor Obrestad, Paal-Helge Haugen, Jan Erik Vold, and Liv Koltzow.



A major concern in *Profil* was the attempt to elaborate a new aesthetic platform in opposition to the current literary establishment. In this endeavor, a recurring effort was made to investigate and come to terms with the concept of Modernism. Espen Haavardsholm, Tor Obrestad, and Dag Solstad wrote articles that explicitly rejected contemporary Norwegian literature, which they saw as out of touch with developments in European literature, and called for a fresh experimental drive in literature. The new aesthetic difference consisted above all suspicion toward language and a rejection of the notion of transparency between signs and referents, which resulted in an interest in structure, form, and play with signifiers. Part of this aesthetic renewal also included an innovative concept of subjectivity where the “I” no longer was seen as a consistent, unified subject, but rather as a shifting set of roles, attitudes or possibilities. In retrospect, it is clear that the *Profil* revolution was a manifestation of a desire to make a difference rather than a thorough and conscious development of a consistent ideology or aesthetics. The journal served as a laboratory for experimental thought and writing and its own modernism varied within the group and even from work to work for individual authors.

With regard to poetry, the situation was slightly different. The great debate between modernists and traditionalists in the 1940s and '50s occurred as Swedish “fyrktotalism” [high Modernism] was introduced to Norway by the poet, translator, and critic Paal Brekke. Brekke’s translation of T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* in 1949 was an important occasion. Strong modernist poets like Rolf Jacobsen, Tarjei Vesaas, Olav H. Hauge, Gunvor Hofmo, Stein Mehren, and Georg Johannesen challenged the public’s lyrical taste, developing the genre in a Norwegian context in very different ways. By the 1930s, Jacobsen had already begun his life-long concern with the tensions between technology and nature while Vesaas worked to articulate the experience of the war. Hauge mixed a wide international influence with a poetry anchored in the characteristic forms of the western Norwegian landscape; Hofmo cultivated a poetic Expressionism in the shadow of the war; Mehren explored symbolic imagery; and Johannesen cultivated a poetry that sought a meaningful political engagement. A sense of a new world and an opening of

the poetic field emerged in the 1960s with the rise of a new generation of poets. Jan Erik Vold popularized poetry through jazz-and-poetry performances while Paal-Helge Haugen introduced the Japanese haiku and investigated graphic styles, ready-mades, and visual effects.

Eldrid Lunden published several early compositions in *Profil*; her initial poems, which later were included in her first book, appeared in volume 4 in 1966. She also worked as a co-editor of the journal in 1967 and 1968. It is probable that the journal and its dynamic climate played a significant role as inspiration for her poetic thinking and creativity; it is not likely that Lunden viewed *Profil* as simply a receptacle for her writing. According to Lunden herself, the *Profil* milieu was one of the most stimulating experiences during her years as a student. She withdrew from the journal when it changed its ideology around 1970 when it became a mouthpiece for Marxism. A political awareness is nevertheless central to Lunden, and the second wave feminism of the 1960s and '70s comprises an important social background for and ideological influence on her writings. Her feminist thinking is neither conformist nor mainstream, and the political components to her texts (essays and poems) are often provocative and always critical—including criticism directed at the tendencies of the feminist movement itself.

It is impossible not to include other female poets when considering sources of inspiration for Eldrid Lunden. Lunden explicitly refers to Edith Södergran as one of her earliest favorite poets; in 2001 Lunden published an in-depth analysis of Södergran's work. An important medium for the communication of poetic voices for several decades was the popular radio program "Ønskediktet" [My favourite poem], to which Lunden listened. Most admired of all the poets in this program was Halldis Moren Vesaas, who, like Lunden, wrote in "Nynorsk," New Norse, based on rural Norwegian dialects and Old Norse. Prominent poets in the Nynorsk tradition include Aslaug Vaa and Marie Takvam, both of whom must be counted as important forerunners for Lunden, who wrote an important article on Takvam's poetry in 1981. Inger Hagerup, Gunvor Hofmo, Astrid Hjertenæs Andersen, Astrid Tollefsen, Magli Elster, and Kate Næss

are important female writers who wrote in “Bokmål,” based on Danish.<sup>1</sup> These poets write with different styles and tones, and do not belong to any particular groups, except for that of their gender. This fact is not insignificant, however, not only due to the question of female / feminine identity and topics such as motherhood, female bodies, and desire, but also because of gender consciousness as such. In poetry, as well as in essays, interviews, and criticism, Lunden emphasizes gender issues as a crucial concern in her own work.<sup>2</sup>

The poetic climate in Norway 1968 was rich, but heterogeneous. Alongside the classical modernist aesthetics (and also more traditional poetic forms), a wide range of experimental poetry and new media-transgressing art forms flourished. Poetry “happened” in jazz-clubs, in political and grassroots arenas, in student forums, in sub-cultural milieus, and in writing laboratories. Lunden alludes to this atmosphere in her first book, *f.eks. juli* [e.g. *July*], and the book itself is correspondingly characterized by a non-conformist style. But she never joined the hard-core experimentalists and the avant-garde poetry of the Nordic literary scene in the 1960s, which Danish author Hans-Jørgen Nielsen labeled “third phase Modernism”<sup>3</sup>; it did not appeal to her kind of creativity. Her first book reflects the various experiences that influence a young woman with roots in the landscape and language of the west coast, the different styles and traditions of Norwegian poetry, and the academic and international impulses at the university.

## Work and Reception

Ten years after her debut in 1968, Eldrid Lunden stated that the publication of her poems happened more or less by chance. The attention attracted by this first appearance was nevertheless positive and

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Langås, “Mod et nyt sprog: Modernismen og kvindene i norsk etterkrigs-lyrik” [Towards a New Language: Modernism and the Women in Norwegian Post World War Poetry].

<sup>2</sup> Interviews with Lunden and her academic publications are collected in her three volumes of essays published in 1982, 2004, and 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Hans-Jørgen Nielsen, *Eksempler: En generationsantologi* [Examples. A Generation Anthology] 155.

unforeseen. In her own eyes, she had written poems about her personal misery, but the media treated her as a “pop girl,” dismissing the emotions in her poetry as a form of cultivated angst. The positive reception did not encourage her to go on writing: seven years passed before her next volume appeared.

*f.eks. juli* is stylistically and thematically heterogeneous. The title and the cover design (by Per Kleiva) signify an anti-symbolic and a matter-of-fact attitude. The technical abbreviation “f.eks.” [e.g.] clashes with the conventionally poetic word “juli” [July], and the anticipated colorful summer imagery is replaced by thick black-and-white lines framing the fragile contours of a leaf. The image and contrast conjure up impressions of conflict, and the texts confirm that friction, tension, and unease are the main motifs of the book. The poems describe impressions from the western Norwegian coastal landscape, childhood scenes, and an experience with a nature that, while familiar, is seldom harmless. Einar Økland responds to Lunden’s debut in an introduction to a later volume of her selected poems. He identifies the most important topics in *f.eks. juli* as bodily awareness in a child, experiences of landscape, and the sudden, adult perception of identity—an identity disrupted by experiences, memories, insights, farewells, loneliness, and contact. As a whole, the poems gathered in this work produce an existential literature, Økland states.<sup>4</sup> He is right in describing *f.eks. juli* as an experiment in the poetic genre where different methods and motives are tested. This experimental undertaking was necessary, though, in order to prepare for the more sophisticated aesthetic that Eldrid Lunden explored in her next three collections.

Three thin volumes with a striking similarity, *Inneringa* [Circumvented], 1975, *hard, mjuk* [hard, soft], 1976, and *Mammy, blue*, 1977, represent Lunden’s definitive poetic breakthrough. These books have become recognized as high points in modern Norwegian poetry; *Mammy, blue* is probably the most well known of Lunden’s works. The combination of a condensed style and cyclic coherence

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<sup>4</sup> Einar Økland, “Å kjenne seg att” [Recognitions]. Introduction to Eldrid Lunden’s *Dikt i utval* [Selected Poems] 6.

has influenced numerous other literary endeavors, most notably among young female writers.

Water in various forms is a constant element throughout these volumes, whether it be pouring rain or a light drizzle, dew, drops, ice, snow, sea, or rivers. *Inneringa* depicts a rural landscape where nature and human consciousness interfere and where the rain represents a basic condition in life. The volume is divided into five parts, each containing small poems without titles. The poems are written from the third person perspective, both singular and plural, a compositional technique that produces a flexible alternation between the epic mode and that of reflection. The wet landscape provides a context for contemplation on the lives of the generations inhabiting that particular place, and on the changing conditions in modernity such as greater mobility and emigration. Identities and relations are likewise inscribed in water, both literally and figuratively.

The poetic style in *Inneringa* is smoother than in *f.eks. juli*. Rhythmically calm and metaphorically less marked by intransigent contrasts, these poems evoke visual thought. Descriptions of nature animate objects, giving them both mental capacity and a role as agents, and thus establish nature as a historic subject. Traces of a growing conflict become visible in poems concerning the relationship between a man and a woman in a city setting. The hectic urban pace seems to influence their lives negatively and the rain (inherently natural) is not welcomed anymore, but rather, is met with sighs. The man and woman appear separately on buses, trains, and platforms, as if to underscore the emergent distance between them. Alienation from life and additional difficulties in cultivating loving relationships are implied in this frantic setting; inter-personal frictions add new dimensions to the development of the nature versus the city theme.

*hard, mjuuk* concentrates to a greater extent on the consciousness of a woman, on her relation to her own body, and on her relationships with other women and men. A hypersensitive awareness is brought about due to Lunden's poetic technique in which body parts, instead of an emotion or a person, metonymically comprise the poem. Experiences of love and desire as well as fear and uncertainty thus

become visual, but the reader's ultimate understanding of the poetic expression remains unclear. Ambiguity characterizes the individual poems, which are simultaneously made more accessible and open to interpretation when contextualized in the work as a whole. There is a she-he relationship in many of the poems: it frequently oscillates between desire and disappointment, and perhaps even an uncompromising love that remains threatening. Shyness and withdrawal characterize this woman who leans toward intimacy and reluctance. However, this approach is interrupted and any further character development remains uncertain.

Aesthetically *Mammy, blue* is similar in composition to the two previous books, but it also constitutes a new phase as it introduces an "I" and a name searching for a voice. The first of four sections consist of poems focused on Anna, her sensual experiences, and her movements in a coastal landscape. By means of a subtle use of enjambment, metonymical images, and irregular syntax, Lunden creates an atmosphere where the subject's cautious attempts at establishing an identity and finding verbal expressions are reflected in the poetic language itself. The syntax underlines the interactions between a landscape and a human being, a context where the woman seems to see herself mirrored in the various qualities of nature. A fragile self is on its way to becoming both a visible and a verbal subject.

*Mammy, blue* is composed serially by images taken from a young woman's life. The book is divided into four sections; the divisions do not follow a chronology, but rather are thematic in nature. I interpret these sections as follows: the first deals with the feminine identity, her senses, and language; the second with conflicts, fear, and breakdown; the third section with relationships with other people, notably the mother; and the fourth with creative processes and bodily consciousness. The title provides a melancholy note that carries throughout the text; there are certainly motifs throughout the book conventionally associated with depression such as sadness, pain, and ambivalence regarding the image of the mother. The poems in the third section in particular can be read as an aesthetic encounter with the tension linked to the concept of the mother as both idealized and repulsive, close and distant.

Eldrid Lunden established herself as an important, innovative poet with these three books from the mid 1970s. The immediate critical response identified Lunden's poetry as a "female voice" that provided a new approach to familiar female issues. Merete Rød Larsen, in an early analysis, reads *hard, mjuk* as an investigation into the life of a woman and her search for an authentic self. However, Rød Larsen also admits to the difficulty of stabilizing gender dichotomies.<sup>5</sup> Lunden's interest in the subject and language, as well as her analytic-yet-sensitive writing, calls for interpretations inspired by structuralism and deconstruction. Anne-Marie Rekdal analyzes the structure of dichotomy in *hard, mjuk* as an extension and critique of male language<sup>6</sup> while Lisbeth Pettersen underscores the play of meaning in the text.<sup>7</sup>

Hanne Aga is one of Lunden's younger colleagues, who refers to Lunden as both a model and forerunner. In an essay from 1986, she interprets Lunden's poetry as "språket som vart til kropp og såleis til gjenkjenning for mange fortvila språklause, for alle dei som ante sine eigne kroppslege kjelder, men som hadde gått seg vill og sår i den språklege språkløysa" [the language that transcended into body and thus became a recognition for many desperate people unable to communicate, for they sensed their own bodily sources but were bewildered and wounded in the verbal lack of words].<sup>8</sup> She sees *hard, mjuk* as encouraging a search for language in ordinary life as well as new poetic possibilities.

The Danish critic Poul Borum attracted attention when he wrote an essay on all the poetry published in Norway in 1979. Surprisingly,

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<sup>5</sup> Merete Rød Larsen, "Om ho lever i mannssamfunnet? Ja, og mannen": Om Eldrid Lundens poesi i *hard, mjuk* (1976)" ["Whether She Lives in a Sexist Society? Yes, and the Man": On Eldrid Lunden's Poetry in *hard, soft* (1976)].

<sup>6</sup> Anne Marie Rekdal, "Med lydløs styrke i stega": Ein analyse av Eldrid Lundens diktsamling *hard, mjuk*" ["With Soundless Strength in the Steps": An Analysis of Eldrid Lunden's Collection *hard, soft*].

<sup>7</sup> Lisbeth Pettersen, "The Dance of Meaning": Betydningsspill i Eldrid Lundens diktsamling *hard, mjuk* (1975)" ["The Dance of Meaning": The Play of Signification in Eldrid Lunden's Collection *hard, soft* (1975)].

<sup>8</sup> Hanne Aga, "Det poetiske prosjektet: Om *hard, mjuk* av Eldrid Lunden" [The Poetic Project: On *hard, soft* by Eldrid Lunden] 11.

Borum's analysis proved extremely critical of the majority of the works. *Mammy, blue*, however, is in his opinion "den mest fuldændte og prægtige digtsamling jeg har læst på længe" [the most complete and wonderful volume of poetry I have read in a long time].<sup>9</sup> Tore Renberg's essay on *Mammy, blue* from 1994 shows the continued interest in Lunden's book among younger authors. Renberg gives a personal but also highly analytical interpretation. His close engagement with the poems reveals a fascination that inspires an intense reflection on the rhetorical quality and manifold meanings of the text.<sup>10</sup>

Lunden's style continued to evolve, and by 1982 we hear a new, expository voice speaking in *Gjenkjennelsen* [*The Recognition*]. *Gjenkjennelsen* mainly deals with the relation between the individual and society; the poetic style is more appellative in its structure than that found in the poet's former voice. The poems investigate the power of language through dialogues with the reader and with other women. These dialogues can also be seen as an extended inquiry into language in the context of feminism. Several poems specifically focus on the role of language in the constitution of the individual. Others—and perhaps the whole volume itself—can be read as a commentary on the tradition of the silent woman. Recurring throughout the work is the question of why traditional attitudes and assumptions are difficult to change: the feminist voice is also critical of women themselves, their hierarchies, and their normative behaviors. The poems revolve around issues such as women's work, women's sexuality, women's exposure to violence, and women's own violence. The questioning attitude of the main poetic voice and the fragmented, rudimentary answers offer few conclusions as they present the reader with diverse propositions and unresolved problems. The mind finds little rest in this text.

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<sup>9</sup> Poul Borum, "Sola, mor, gi meg sola!": 150 norske diktsamlinger 1975–79" ["The Sun, Mother, Give Me the Sun!": 150 Norwegian Poetry Collections from the Years 1976–79] 21.

<sup>10</sup> Tore Renberg, "Noe anna, noe heilt anna. Flekken på tunga i Eldrid Lundens *Mammy, blue*" [Something Different, Something Quite Different: The Spot on the Tongue in Eldrid Lunden's *Mammy, blue*].



The poet Liv Lundberg provides this characterization of *Gjenkjennelsen*:

Hennes poesi er kjølig—så du fryser på ryggen, klar—så du kan sanse følelser direkte i bildene. Den er ironisk og varm, hard i kantene og mjuk i fingertuppene. Bilder fra kropp og omverden smelter sammen med begrep til et enhetlig poetisk språk, der alt samles i uhyre komprimerte og vakkert komponerte diktmusikkbilder.<sup>11</sup>

[Her poetry is cool—so that your back freezes, clear—so that you can sense the feelings directly in the images. It is ironic and warm, has hard edges and soft fingertips. Images from body and surroundings melt together with concepts to a total poetic language, where everything is gathered in extremely compressed and beautifully composed poetry-music-images. My translation: Unless specified, all prose translations are my own.]

*Det omvendt avhengige* [*The Opposite Dependent*] (1989) focuses to a great extent on philosophical questions. Many poems in the book explore existential themes such as life and death or presence and absence. Often quite concrete in terms of their imagery, they are still wonderfully aporetic: violence is articulated through missing black-and-blue marks on the neck and pain is an absent knife wandering around in the body. Fragments of fairy tales as well as texts traditionally assigned to one gender or the other are interwoven throughout Lunden's poems. This intertextual quality gives Lunden the opportunity for dialogue, parody, commentary, and critique. The poetic thinking often occurs by means of a rhetorical loop that indicates the end of a poem while echoing its beginning. The repetition is, of course, one with a slight difference; thus, an ultimate or overarching meaning (and interpretation) is deferred. The effect, as intimated by

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<sup>11</sup> Liv Lundberg, "Den minste og kvassaste flammen: Om *Gjenkjennelsen* av Eldrid Lunden" [The Smallest and Sharpest Flame: On *The Recognition* by Eldrid Lunden] 62.

the cover itself, is to enforce a critical conception where things are similar yet different. The red velvet texture with the white strip inscribed rather technically upon its surface signifies a variety of connections, including that between language and the unconscious. Readers of the book, such as Lisbeth Pettersen<sup>12</sup> and Bjarte Rekdal,<sup>13</sup> have discussed the overt philosophical ambitions of the collection and both refer to the Möbius strip on the cover as alluding to deconstruction and to Lacanian psychoanalysis.<sup>14</sup>

Lunden's dialogues with other texts often occur in a series. Such is the case in *Noen må ha vore her før* [*Some One Must Have Been Here Before*] (1990), where two of the six sections are concerned with the painter and author Christian Krohg, his wife and painter Oda Krohg, pianist and author Dagny Juell, and the fictive Albertine, a character in many of Christian Krohg's paintings as well as in his novel *Albertine* (1886). These persons belong culturally to an epoch described as The Modern Breakthrough in Norway as well as in the other nordic countries, in which gender conflicts occupied a large part of the aesthetic and political agenda. *Albertine* relates Krohg's story about a seamstress who becomes a prostitute after having been raped by a policeman. His novel and paintings were intended to be (and were also regarded as) political contributions to the debates in the 1880s regarding hypocrisy in sexual matters, prostitution, poverty, and women's rights.

Lunden appropriates these characters to produce a renewed reflection on art and gender in the contemporary culture. As in *Gjenkjennelsen*, the poems present a critical voice, but the perspective this time is not so much political and philosophical as it is historic and hermeneutic. The portrait, the mirror, and the frame serve as motifs that in various ways shed light on issues such as self-

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<sup>12</sup> Lisbeth Pettersen, "Eldrid Lunden & Jacques Lacan."

<sup>13</sup> Bjarte Rekdal, "Eldrid Lunden og Lacan: 'Det stille punktet i konstant forskyvning'" [Eldrid Lunden and Lacan: 'The Silent Spot in Constant Deferral].

<sup>14</sup> A Möbius strip has a one-sided surface that can be constructed by affixing the ends of a rectangular strip after first having given one of the ends a half twist. This space exhibits interesting properties, such as having only one side and the ability to remain in one piece when split down the middle.

esteem and identity from an artistic perspective. In addition, the mirror contains properties that (in a reflection of the historically perceived fragility of women) allow it to be “injured.” The mirror can receive stripes, it can be broken, and, intriguingly, one can cut oneself on it once it has been broken. Lunden spreads many fragments of broken glass throughout the pages of this book. *Noen må ha vore her før* received much positive attention and was described as an “easier” book than her former one.

*Slik Sett* [*Seen That Way*] (1996) indicates its theme early: the title itself alludes to the way in which things can be seen from different points of view and by varying temperaments. The result is a textual aesthetic that recalls the symphony—multiple instrumental voices, in concert and contrast, work together to produce a cohesive symphonic statement. However, the title is the most humble of rhetoric constructions: an outworn and indifferent cliché. It anticipates a poetry in which ordinary language and clichés will occur side by side with existentialist motifs. A main topic in this volume, familiar to Lunden readers, is that of seeing and being seen. However, in this iteration it is connected to a gaze that is both lustful and lively. Several poems relate the fragments of a story about a woman who lives in “Fangens veg” [Prisoner’s Road] 14 and a man who watches and thinks of her. Others suggest Ibsen’s *Når vi døde vågner* [*When We Dead Awaken*] (1899) in which the sculptor Rubek and his model Irene, both disillusioned, reflect on life rigidly dedicated to art. They try to restore their relationship and their forgotten ambitions by climbing a mountain, only to find themselves swept away by an avalanche. A similar destiny awaits the Swedish aeronaut Andrée, who made a polar expedition on an airship and died in the ice. His fate later became the topic of a novel (by Per Olof Sundman) and two films (by Jan Troell). Lunden’s integration of these intertextual images, themes, and narratives does not aim to provide an interpretation, but rather molds them into images, revealing new and unexpected contours in the process.

*Slik Sett*, which was nominated for the Nordic Council Literature Prize, was subjected to an in-depth review by one of Lunden’s younger colleagues, Karl Ove Knausgård. Knausgård takes the

opportunity to review the rest of her work as well. He foregrounds the desire for change found in Lunden's images, themes, and motifs, but also examines the obvious constancy in Lunden's poetry. He points to the recurring dichotomies that are dissolved and decomposed, to the thematic diversity that is held together by an inner coherence between poetic units without titles, at a totality that is not fragmented, but rather always in its beginnings. Somewhat reluctant to compare this volume with undisputed successes like *Mammy, blue* and *Det omvendt avhengige*, Knausgård emphasizes the aesthetic subtlety of Lunden's language:

Den finstilte oppmerksomheten for språklige nyanser i Lundens språk; diktene beveger seg så uanstrengt i ulike stilnivå og toneleier, skaper et rom rundt seg stort nok til å inkorporere element eller diskurser som ellers er rake motsetninger, men som her, i diktene, blir fratatt sin status som definitive, og med det glir over i hverandre.<sup>15</sup>

[The careful attention paid to linguistic nuances in Lunden's language; the poems move easily on different levels of style and tone, they create a space around themselves big enough to incorporate elements or discourses that are otherwise complete opposites, but here, in the poems, they are deprived of their status as definitive, and thus glide into each other.]

*Til stades [In Place]* (2000) could be called an amalgam of poetry and travelogue. With the subtitle *Tekstar om erindring og gløymse [Texts About Memory and Forgetting]*, Lunden uses the volume as a genre-independent book devoted to experiences of the past. Childhood memories do play a role, but the majority of the texts are connected to stays in the Mediterranean area—Italy, France, and Spain—where archaeological remnants and classical artworks provide occasions for meditation. Some of the texts are poems, some are descriptions of and reflections on historical persons and architecture,

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<sup>15</sup> Karl Ove Knausgård, "Aldri bare begge deler" [Never Only Both] 31.

and some are pure ekphrases (written descriptions of visual art). If we were to name a unifying feature of this unique text, it would be Lunden's continued investigation into the nature of both things and places as means to produce and store mental experiences.

*Til stades. Tekstar om erindring og gløymse* caught the attention of the media as a "different" Lunden book, and one that some critics consider to be more reader friendly. Øystein Rottem describes how an encounter with a foreign culture can result in a double movement "der man som beskuer ender med å få blikket vendt mot seg selv" [where one as a beholder ends up receiving the gaze turned towards oneself]. Rottem obviously favors the poet to the prosewriter, but admits that the result of his reading here is enlarged by the additional knowledge of the author's other accomplishments.<sup>16</sup> Ingunn Økland agrees with Rottem, judging Lunden's poetry to be "better," but she finds the expansive scope of the book attractive. She summarizes her review in the following way: "I Eldrid Lundens forfatter-skap vil *Til stades* plassere seg som en generøs og slentrende bok: Mindre politisk og retorisk enn de fire siste samlingene, mer humørfyllt og utadvendt enn de fire første" [Eldrid Lunden's work *Til stades* stands as a generous and informal book: less political and rhetorical than her four latest books, more humorous and extroverted than the first four].<sup>17</sup> Ingrid Storholmen, a former student at the Creative Writing program in Bø and a poet herself, conducted an interview with Lunden regarding the new work. Lunden comments on the hybrid character of these texts and maintains that they are not essentially different from her earlier publications: "Eg trur det er karakteristisk for min skrivemåte at bøkene blir ureine, også tidlegare bøker har hatt faktainnslag, forteljande element, refleksjonsdelar osv" [I think it is characteristic of my writing that the books are impure; former books have also had parts comprised of facts, narratives, reflections, etc.].<sup>18</sup>

Lunden's latest volume to date is *Flokken og skuggen* [*The Flock*

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<sup>16</sup> Øystein Rottem, "Reiser i tid og rom" [Journeys in Time and Space].

<sup>17</sup> Ingunn Økland, "Med Eldrid Lunden på kulturhistorisk Interrail" [With Eldrid Lunden on the Interrail in Cultural History].

<sup>18</sup> Ingrid Storholmen, "Direkte omvegar" [Direct Detours].

and the Shadow] (2005), which provides a renewed thematic exploration of language, sense, and thought. In a manner more sober than in earlier volumes, Lunden investigates the relationship between different forms of perception and their connections to intellectual activities as well as verbal and visual representation. *Flokken og skuggen* develops a sophisticated examination of poetic perception. The reader is forced into an awareness of how various modes of experience merge and how it is often difficult to judge between external stimuli and mental projections. Do the objects observed in nature create the images in our minds, or does the body's own perceptual experience determine how such objects are interpreted? Here in Lunden's tenth book, such problems—simultaneously philosophical, aesthetic, and kinesthetic—are presented for our conscious consideration in a manner that challenges conventional intellectual categories such as causality, temporality, and the relationship between form and content.

The reception of *Flokken og skuggen* confirms the importance of Lunden in contemporary Norwegian literature. The book received broad critical attention and a very positive reception from the media. In a survey of Norwegian poetry collections in 2005, Espen Stueland states that Lunden is “skandinavisk toppklasse” [Scandinavian top class],<sup>19</sup> and Johann Grip writes that *Flokken og skuggen* is a culminating achievement in an impressive literary oeuvre. He argues that Lunden, like few other poets, creates sounds even in the textual pauses that allow the reader to experience “stillheten og fraserings betydning” [silence and the meaning of phrasing]. Grip characterizes *Flokken og skuggen* as more “horizontal” than Lunden's earlier works. Things occur in the gaze, which is directed at the horizontal landscape, maintains Grip, things that promote a relational shift between senses, events, and interpretations.<sup>20</sup>

Eldrid Lunden's poetic work is neither homogenous nor simple in its ideas or its aesthetics, but rather a series of empathic and precise responses to experiences of both the inner mental and outer physical

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<sup>19</sup> Espen Stueland, “Bibliotekets eselører v/ noen av dem: Poesiåret 2005” [The Dog-Ears of the Library by Some of Them: The Year of Poetry 2005] 108.

<sup>20</sup> Johann Grip, “I kjent landskap” [In a Familiar Landscape] 40.

landscape. The fact that she is a female human being is something that Lunden never forgets and never ceases to explore. This investigation includes the voices of other women as well as their theoretical and artistic contributions to the subject of gender. Additionally, Lunden possesses an extraordinary sensitivity to language and its rhetorical, philosophical, and ideological dimensions. Her poetry addresses theoretical issues and emphasizes the way in which contemporary society is prone to quickly change its interests and its accepted modes of expression. Lunden's texts are always engaged in dialogue with the current intellectual climate; they communicate with both fine and popular arts, with political ideas and human knowledge, and not least with the simple, cheerful, and at times frightening experiences of an ordinary life.

## The School of Writing

The Creative Writing Studies program at Telemark University College, located in Bø, began in 1982 at the initiative of Den norske forfatterforening [The Norwegian Authors' Union]. It was the first program of its kind in the Scandinavia. From the beginning, Eldrid Lunden headed the program, and today she continues as a professor of creative writing. Since 1992, this one-year undergraduate program has provided students with knowledge of literary theory and practice in fiction. Additionally, students profit from the supportive environment that surrounds the aspiring writer's conscious efforts and creative processes. The program has always been popular, attracting far more applicants than it was possible to accept. Many successful authors have been Lunden's students, including Merete Morken Andersen, Anne Bøe, Gro Dahle, Lisbeth Hiide, Pål Gerhard Olsen, Liv Nysted, Tale Næss, Jonny Halberg, Finn Øglænd, Tone Hødnebo, Geir Gulliksen, Eva Jensen, Hanne Ørstavik, Lars Ramsle, Trude Marstein, Gunnar Wærness, Gaute Heivoll, Ingrid Storholmen, Heidi Marie Kriznik, Sigmund Løvåsen, Stian Bromark, Ragnfrid Trohaug, Agnar Lirhus, and Vemund Aadland.

The students themselves emphasize the unique aspects of their individual experiences with the Bø program. Gro Dahle, now an

established author, enthusiastically notes that “Av Eldrid Lunden fikk jeg noen åpne orakelsvar som jeg har tatt fram på alle plan i livet. Jeg fikk alt!” [From Eldrid Lunden I got some open oracle answers that I have recollected on all levels in my life. I got everything!]. Hanne Ørstavik, another distinguished author, says “Jeg skrev min debutbok der. I Bø fikk jeg tid til å skrive og, kanskje enda viktigere, tro på å skrive. Det var godt å være hos Eldrid Lunden. Hun er en fantastisk leser” [I wrote my debut book there. In Bø I had time to write and, perhaps even more important, a belief in writing. It was good to be with Eldrid Lunden. She is a fantastic reader]. Ørstavik later wrote a novel, *Uke 43* [*Week 43*], located at a school of writing. Geir Gulliksen, who is an author and editor, reflects on the various skills made available through the program: “Jeg forsto det ikke før i ettertid, men forfatterstudiet i Bø var en utrolig god redaktørskole [...] Forfatterskolene, og særlig den i Bø, virker til å utdanne gode lesere” [I did not understand it until later, but the creative writing program in Bø was an extremely good training for an editor [...] The schools of creative writing, and especially the one in Bø, help to produce good readers].<sup>21</sup>

The combination of being an author, teacher, and administrator is, of course, demanding, and Lunden is well aware of the institutional requirements and limitations, as well as the expectations placed on her as an adviser. “Det er ikkje vanskeleg å grave seg ned i jobben” [It is not difficult to bury oneself in the job], she says. But at the same time, the professional and personal communication with the students is both rewarding and very stimulating, Lunden asserts.<sup>22</sup> As an answer to the frequently posed question, whether it is possible to learn to become an author, Lunden says “nei, men forfattarar kan lære noe” [no, but authors can learn something].<sup>23</sup> Some critics have been concerned about the “broiler” effect of the program, insinuating that it molds coming authors into writers whose work is too similar. In his *Norges litteraturhistorie* [*Norwegian Literary History*],

<sup>21</sup> All interviews available in *Dagbladet*, May 16, 2000.

<sup>22</sup> *Sørlandsk Magasin* 1995, 21.

<sup>23</sup> Lunden in *Sørlandsk Magasin* 1995, 20.



Øystein Rottem claims to observe such a tendency in the 1980s and 1990s. Female authors, he says, seem inclined to practice a symbolic style in order to depict an “inner landscape,” while male authors to a greater extent relate to an “external reality” through an objective and economical style. This gendered dichotomy is, however, not only presented as a literary fact; it also implies an aesthetic hierarchy where female forms are labeled “anorectic” and male forms offer a chance for the reader to read between the lines. It is a striking fact, according to Rottem, that female authors who graduate from the schools of creative writing, and especially the school of creative writing at Telemark University College, seem to be partial to this kind of anorectic art. Rottem notes that many of their works show traces both of Lunden’s own poetry and of what he believes to be her literary preferences. Rottem’s judgment is hardly favorable with regard to Lunden’s achievement, and the result, in his opinion, is a regrettable lack of the “good old” traditional epic novel.<sup>24</sup>

It is easy to oppose Rottem’s description and correct his version, but he is right in stating that Lunden and her school of creative writing have produced an influential aesthetic institution in Norway. Interestingly enough, Rottem confirms the poetic power of Eldrid Lunden’s work: fearing and devaluing its effects only serves to validate Lunden’s aesthetic potency. In an interview that appeared in the weekly newspaper *Dag og Tid* (5.12.1996) Eldrid Lunden herself answers this type of reproach, reminding the reader that a wide variety of authors have studied at Telemark University College. She also points to the fact that if there be any likeness between her own writing and that of the students’, it would be superficial and temporary. Poetry can neither be copied nor parodied, Lunden asserts.

It is very difficult to trace the paths of influence, and we shall probably never have the opportunity to fully fill in even a small corner of this picture. But Lunden is perfectly right in to insist on the difference between superficial likeness and the more fundamental influence found in common cultural and epistemological knowledge.

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<sup>24</sup> Øystein Rottem, *Norges litteraturhistorie: Vår egen tid 1980–2000* [Norwegian Literary History: Our Own Time 1980–2000] 752.

I would suggest that Lunden's influence is a combination of both poetic and pedagogical practice, and that both activities are intimately linked to the ideological and aesthetic context of her own work. Rather than establishing a style, preferred genres, or specific themes, the kind of impact represented by Lunden's legacy has to do with competence, awareness, and her voice, unique and contemporary.

## Outline and Argument

In the following chapters, I pursue various thematic points of view. Beginning with politics, Lunden's feminist interest will be the main focus. This engagement is on the one hand an important concern in her work as a writer and as a public voice, and thus a feminist act in itself. On the other hand it also concerns the relationship between politics and aesthetics, between poetry and its social impact. In this chapter I want to elucidate the complexities of the poems as artistic expressions. I read them as utterances about society and women's conditions, as performative acts, and as discussions and reflections on femininity, female experiences, and gender relations.

The second chapter deals with places. A poet can hardly avoid describing places, but Lunden is especially aware of the place as a site of memories and reflections. The landscapes are minutely described as parts of bodily experiences and sensual perceptions, and buildings and ruins serve as material constructions and remnants, which shape, preserve and change the culture. Lunden gives special attention to sacred buildings, churchyards and other burial sites, where the modern gaze encounters the limits of life in a profound meditation about existential matters.

In the third chapter, about artwork, the central theoretical approach is that of the relationship between word and image. Throughout her entire work, Lunden writes about pictures and other works of visual arts, from Stone Age rock carvings, Renaissance paintings and sculptures, to postmodern photography and video art. A core genre of this kind of pictorial description is the classical ekphrasis, which in its modern version tends to renounce meticulous description in favor of a freer meditation. In a certain way, Lunden

even radicalizes this feature, since she often, and relatively systematically, explores the perception processes as such. The striking effect of this, and a contribution to aesthetic theory in itself, is that the reader becomes aware of the uncertain ontological status of the represented object: Is it a picture, a “real thing”, or a mental image?

This problematic is discussed further in the fourth chapter, which investigates a specific kind of rhetorical construction, namely the synaesthetic trope, in order to interpret poetically expressed relationships between body and perception. Synaesthetic language blurs the differences between the senses, and makes them operate on behalf of each other, thus stretching the possibilities of experience towards sense transgression and hypothetic skills. In these readings, I discuss this trope in Lunden’s early and later poems, arguing that her growing interest is to link the vague borders between sensing, perceiving and understanding the world by bodily means to a reflection on how things and feelings exist and do not exist at the same time, such as in memories and anticipations.

The final readings, in chapter five, explore the ludic aspects of Lunden’s poetry. This is a difficult task, because humor is a strange thing, that does not manifest itself clearly. It is a possibility and a hidden resource offered to its reader, and has very much to do with culture and taste. Lunden’s comic repertoire is manifold, but by means of the concept of parody, I want to underscore its often dialogic way of functioning. Alluding to other literary texts, theoreticians, and cultural events, Lunden imitates, asks, and laughs at the same time, creating respect, confusion and even defiance. My tentative argument is that this sort of humor is a poetics that belongs to the essential aesthetics of Lunden’s universe, wherein a continuous questioning and destabilizing effort appear as the primary poetical *modus operandi*.



# 1. Politics:

## Feminism and Female Identities

Second wave feminism, particularly its political issues and discussions, provide an important foundation and represent a necessary background for understanding Eldrid Lunden's work. This assertion does not mean that she writes political poetry so that her texts may act as slogans, provide arguments, or dispense propaganda, but rather that she insists on literature as a way of acting politically. The feminist movement in the 1970s produced a series of cultural products with a clear political function, but these expressions often also had a constricted purpose and mainly served the day-to-day debate.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, Lunden's poetry engages in more fundamental topics, which nevertheless are closely connected with the basic concerns of a political feminist commitment. These issues imply the existential question of identity: of finding a voice and then having the courage to use it in a social situation where women's influence is traditionally less than that of men, and where masculine power and domination need to be contested. Her poems are intended as both a voice of this kind on the public scene—although she is perfectly well aware of the genre's marginalized position—and as an intellectual elaboration on the theme itself.

### Subject, Senses, Speech

*Mammy, blue* portrays Anna and her senses, her perceptions, thoughts, and speech. The book is composed as a combination of poetical images and epical sequence. This structure is innovative in a collection

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<sup>25</sup> Unni Langås, Lisbeth Larsson, and Anne Birgitte Richard, "Ud af naturhistorien, ind i moderniteten: 70'ernes nye kvindeoffentlighed" [Out of Nature-History, into Modernity: The New Female Public Arena in the 1970s], in Elisabeth Møller Jensen, ed. *Nordisk kvindelitteraturhistorie, Volume IV: På jorden*. København: Rosinante-Munksgaard, 1997, 146-155.

of poetry, but has a possible forerunner in Paal-Helge Haugen's novel *Anne* (1968), which itself is not strictly a novel, but also poetry. The central focus of *Mammy, blue* is a person who has a detailed sense of the landscape and her bodily constitution and whose voice repeatedly gives us her name: "Eg er Anna" [I am Anna]. The poems form what may be described as strong vibrating points that represent the various phases, aspects, and conditions of this woman's life. Eldrid Lunden commented on the composition of the work in the following way:

*Mammy, blue* består av ein serie bilete (dikt) frå ei kvinnes liv. Serien strekkjer seg frå dei første erindra sanseintrykk og fram til 28 års alder. Bileta er korkje skrivne eller presenterte i såkalla naturleg rekkjefylgje. Dei er nok ordna i puljer, eller avdelingar, men hovudstrukturen i boka er meint å skulle utfordre dei fleste lesarars innlærde forventning om at kronologi nødvendigvis inneber ei eller anna form for utvikling.<sup>26</sup>

[*Mammy, blue* consists of a series of images [poems] from the life of a woman. The series spans from the early memories of perceptions to a point when she is about 28 years of age. The images are neither written nor presented in a so-called natural order. They are certainly arranged into sequences or parts, but the primary structure of the book has been formed with the intention of challenging the reader's internalized expectation of the notion that chronology necessarily signifies some kind of development.]

The physical environment in *Mammy, blue* consists of a coastal landscape with the sea, birds, a beach, and a road, as well as the accompanying various climatic conditions. Water in its shifting forms is permanently present; it serves as both a realistic description of the scenery and as a way of expressing mental conditions and relations. Several poems deal with an inner discomfort and elaborate on ambivalent relationships, while others explore the concept of freedom. The opening poem:

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<sup>26</sup> Lunden, quoted from Einar Økland, ed., *Høydepunkt I* [*Highlights I*], 150.

Eg går over sakte blått  
land med mild luft over  
hendene, regnet opnar og  
lukkar seg stille. (97)<sup>27</sup>

[I go through slow blue  
country with mild air over  
my hands, the rain opening and  
shutting gently.]

The poem introduces an “I” who is in the middle of everything: geographically between sea, sky, and land; meteorologically between air, rain, and wind; and mentally between perception, body, and speech. The woman is written into an intimate awareness of nature through her senses. The next poem shifts the point of view to her body, a silent sign:

Eit kvitt teikn, den  
tagale  
rørsla i ei lys  
kåpe som snudde og  
gjekk sakte innover stranda. (97)

[A white sign, the  
silent  
movement in a pale  
coat that turned and  
slowly walked away on the shore.]

Her movements are soundless and slow; the woman has lost her voice and is instead represented via another person’s voice and gaze, represented through a metonymical trope as a “kåpe” [coat]. She is, in a way, reduced to a coat, to a movement, and to a sign. But this apparent reduction simultaneously creates a strong sense of signification:

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<sup>27</sup> I refer to Eldrid Lunden: *Dikt i samling* [Collected Poems], 2001.

the poem manifests a visual impression that recurs throughout the book. A connection is forged between this poem and others where Anna sees “kvite / fuglar mot stormen” [white / birds against the storm] (99) “kvitnande / gras” [whitening / grass] (106) and “flak-sande frakkar” [flapping coats] (106) in the rain and the wind. While the first poem describes Anna as a pale coat interpreted as a white, silent sign, she is later—in the lines quoted above—related to the white birds that flutter in the air above the coastal landscape. Additional poems also depict her as both light and bright, suggesting perhaps that she could fly away like a bird: “noe lett kom med lyset som eit / blaff på vekta” [something light came with the light as a / puff on the scales] (100). This lightness is balanced by other poems that insist on the essential weight of birds: “tunge måsar” [heavy gulls] (129).

This dynamic tension between appearance and disappearance, between lightness and heaviness, characterizes the first part of the book. It seems to reproduce itself in other motifs and perceived phenomena as well. The emphasis on the self-perceiving subject is strong: the repetition of the formula “Eg er Anna” occurs five times in this part of the book, five times in the second part, and twice in the fourth. But at the same time, the constative utterance may signal a doubt precisely because it is so insistent—why the need for continued affirmation, unless as a response to an already existent doubt? Moreover, there is an ambiguity in the name “Anna” itself because the word is both a name and (with a small letter) an impersonal pronoun, meaning “someone else.” Thus, Anna is both herself and someone or something else; she is a split subject, a subject in search of an identity in contrast to and in a relationship with an “other.” Anna exists on the edge between appearance and disappearance, as a possibility in an intersubjective and relational situation.

Through a gradual process, Anna’s identity finds its shape in this perceptual and linguistic transitoriness. This journey, however, is not without a gesture that insistently presents an “I” to the world. In three important stanzas Anna finds words for her self, and Lunden allows senses and speech provide a way into a visual identity:



Eg er Anna, eg er tjuetåtte  
år, eg er synleg  
mot entredøra kvar morgon, ei open  
rørsle i lufta.

Eg er Anna, eg er tjuetåtte  
år. Eg tenker oftare og oftare  
på at eg er synleg mot entrédøra  
kvar morgon, så sit eg i bilen.

Eg er Anna, eg har  
ein flekk på tunga  
det er eit ord der, det  
veit eg. (98)

[I am Anna, I am twenty-eight  
years old, I am visible  
against the front door every morning, an open  
movement in the air.

I am Anna, I am twenty-eight  
years old. I think more and more often  
about being visible against the front door  
each morning, then I sit in the car.

I am Anna, I've got  
a spot on my tongue  
there's a word there, I  
know that.]

The stanzas repeat their focus on language and the speaking subject who, consequently, is associated with a type of sensual core. They insist on the fact that the theme of identity and visibility belongs to language. At the same time, language seems to be both hard to find and difficult to articulate, reduced as it is through the metaphorical and metonymical expression “ein flekk på tunga” [a spot on my

tongue]. The connotations surrounding this image are intimately tied to that of sensing—taste, touch, speech, and gaze—a fact that emphasizes the perceptual basis of subjectivity.<sup>28</sup>

The poems in the first part of *Mammy, blue* can be read as an open investigation into the significance of signs and the senses in the construction of an identity. Eldrid Lunden emphasizes the fragile and transitory character of perception, experience, and language, but also foregrounds the strength inherent in poetry's creation of meaning. The poems in this section are both hovering interpretations of vague impressions and subtle sensitivities and an invitation to discover the power of threshold energy in the emerging subject. In this interplay, Lunden focuses on a declarative subject who self-identifies—the “I”—and explores the various processes by which a voice, and a self, are achieved.

## A Song about Mum

“Mammy, blue” is a well-known hit, sung by the Pop-Tops in the 1970s and later by Roger Whittaker. The song tells the story of a son who leaves home at the age of 21 and now returns, missing his mother. The house where they used to live stands lonely and deserted as his mind fills with memories from his childhood—the son, sad and lonely, remembers his mother as the only one who loved him. The walls of the house stare silently at him: devoid of life, it is a dead place. The sky is dark, the wind strong, and the future perceived as “small.” The refrain repeats the apostrophe “Oh mammy, oh mammy, mammy, blue.” The song articulates a loss and longing tied to the mother, and the young man connects his sorrow with the empty room in the house that is no longer his home, now abandoned like an empty shell.

Lunden's text also contains a significant number of poems that address a maternal character, but her approach includes something in its indirect experience of loss that the song misses. The mother

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<sup>28</sup> In *Tanke til begjær: Nylesingar i nordisk lyikk* [*Thoughts of Desire: New Readings in Nordic Lyrics*], I have tried to connect this theme to Julia Kristeva's ideas regarding subject constitution (Grønstøl and Langås 2001). Cf. Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language, part I: The Semiotic and the Symbolic*.

imagery in Lunden spans from phantasmatic mothers, who irritatingly stick to body and mind, to the ordinary mothers, who have much to say, but who unfortunately never manage to bring their opinions beyond the drying rack. The third section of the book, where many of these mother poems occur, is introduced by a poem where an “I” sees itself as smaller than both “ein hund” [a dog] and “ein katt” [a cat]. The poem finishes with the word “sørgeleg” [sorrowful]—a lingering trace that sets an appropriately melancholy background mood for the poems to come.

Eller eg ser meg langt  
nede på ein veg, mindre  
enn ein hund, mindre enn  
ein katt, men like varm  
i meg liksom, og temmeleg  
sørgeleg. (111)

[Or I see myself far  
below on a road, smaller  
than a dog, smaller  
than a cat, but sort of just as  
warm inside and reasonably  
sorrowful.]

As if to underscore that these lines provide a new version of the appearance of an identity, the poem starts with the word “Eller” [Or] and continues with the portrait of a woman who sees herself from a distance. In this case, the distance is spatial, but in other poems it is also temporal; for instance, the second poem in this section is related from “natta” [the night] and the third places the events on the “neste dag” [next day].

The second poem has two subjects, “kvinna” [the woman] and “barnet” [the child], both of whom are depicted with distinctive facial attributes: the woman has a “mørknande munn” [darkening mouth] and the child a “blomsteransikt” [flower face]. This play between dark and light continues throughout the entire poem, creat-

ing through this metonymical style an impressionistic effect. It is unclear to whom the dress, the back, and the voices belong:

kvinna med mørknande munn  
barnet med blomsteransikt

Ein lys kjole inn i mørkret  
stemmer med ryggen til  
plutseleg dukkar ho fram av  
natta med andletet så  
absolutt først. (111)

[the woman with the darkening mouth  
the child with the flower face

A light dress in the dark  
voices with their backs turned  
suddenly she turns up out of  
the night with her face so  
very much face forward.]

The poem's rhetoric creates certain images and impressions in the reader, but the lack of coherence leaves the interpretation open. Is the woman with the darkening mouth a "mammy, blue"—a dark skinned mother? Does the flower face provide an allusion to "flower power" and thus to the countercultural revolutions—including feminism—of the aforementioned 1960s and '70s? Both associations belong to an American context and may remind us of a protest poster, but the rest of the poem does not support such a reading. Perhaps it would be productive to read the first part as ekphrastic with the second part serving as its story—the image set in motion? The reference in the second segment of the poem to something that arises from darkness may also indicate another interpretive path: that of memory and maternity. Is this unidentified arising a mother who surfaces from oblivion? Does it recall birth—a child who makes its way out from the mother's "darkening mouth"? Or is the poem an intersec-

tion of a double memory/event, where the child creates itself in a renewed elaboration of the relationship to its mother? In this case, the poem provides a remembrance of the mother and at the same time it commemorates the manifestation of an “I” to be born.

In several of the following poems the mother image takes on a more negative tone. The woman is proportionally distorted, at times described as a mere body and others as the grotesque, expansive, and all-encompassing female body that places the “I” under a claustrophobic strain.

Ei tung kvinne kjem tett  
inn på meg, alle fuktige  
kvinner stappar alle munnar  
naser fulle med tjukke  
kvite bryst og lår og  
ler og ler og ler. (116)

[A heavy woman closes in  
on me, all moist  
women stuff all mouths  
noses full of fat  
white breasts and thighs and  
laugh and laugh and laugh.]

Here we find a stylized exaggeration that resonates with other poems that utilize expressions from the carnivalesque tradition, constructing an antithesis to the conformal “good mother.” Two poems employ the word “sklir” [sliding] as a central attribute of the subject. This “sklir” echoes the formal structure of the mother-daughter bond as a relationship inscribed within a dynamic interdependence. Water and clothing each emphasize this reciprocity, albeit via unpleasant imagery, while simultaneously denoting the strength and the permanence inherent in the mother-daughter relationship:

Sklir nedover, sklir  
tilbake til mors

liv, bak forkleet noe  
som slit og gøymer seg, slit  
i det håplaust falma stoffet. (112)

[Sliding down, sliding  
back into mother's  
body behind the apron something  
tearing away, hiding, tearing  
at the hopelessly faded cloth.]

Sklir tilbake, sklir  
nedover i mors  
liv, det slimete  
regnet i tankane  
kjensla av kløe  
i vatnet. (117)

[Sliding back, sliding  
down into mother's  
body, the slimy  
rain in my thoughts  
the itchy feeling  
in the water.]

The poems describe a regressive movement, an involuntary return to the mother. At a physical level the motif represents a reversed birth, but we should also notice the phrase “regnet i tankane” [rain in my thoughts], which indicates that this mother-daughter bond also occurs on a mental level. The multiple words signifying discomfort, such as “slit” [tearing], “slimete” [slimy], and “kløe” [itchy], imply that the tie between mother and child is fundamentally uncomfortable, perhaps even painful.

The remaining poems offer up the shifting images of the mother as both close and distant. She not only appears as disturbing phantasms from the depths of consciousness as a “svamp på innsida av kjenslene” [sponge on the inside of the emotions] (118), but is also

clearly depicted as the head of everything, from the body and emotions to “løn, skatt og det gode liv” [wages, taxes and the good life] (118). Consequently, this mother character is appropriately connected to water—symbol of both change and stability in its unvarying fluidity. The two final poems from this section bring a satirical, even ironic, touch to the maternal image: “Ser ei kvinne som har kasta armene / sine på elva” [I see a woman who has thrown her arms / into the river] (119). The implied watery embrace reconfigures the connection between the mother and her ability to hold on to her child—ironically, the ultimate constancy of the maternal lies in the inevitable temporal shift that occurs as the child grows up. Lunden also includes a demonstration of the mother’s disappearance through the conventions of naming when she alludes to Sigrid Undset: “Soga om Kristin Ragnfridsdotter / som blei Kristin Lavransdatter” [The story of Kristin Ragnfridsdotter / who became Kristin Lavransdatter] (119). This transferal also provides a more political commentary on the linguistic suppression of the Nynorsk “dotter” by the Bokmål “datter.”

The young man in “Mammy, blue” expresses his sorrow through song. The empty house that evokes the memories of his childhood is empty, a void—the place is unable to provide a substitute for the absent mother. But in the symbolic language of the song, which functions on both a musical and a verbal level, the image of mother gains a new expression. In the mother’s absence, the vacant house can function as a site where forgotten feelings can be remembered and re-actualized, transformed into sound and word. This process has been theorized as “melancholy” by scholars of art where “melancholy” serves as a concept that connects the artistic inspiration with a loss and emphasizes the ability of art and language to deal with the grief.<sup>29</sup>

This aesthetic process is undoubtedly what occurs in the song “Mammy, blue,” but in the poetry collection *Mammy, blue* the larger picture is more complex. In place of an explicit mourning, the poems depict multiple approaches to the mother, including abstract, ordinary, imaginary, and concrete representations. The tone of the lyrical voice is correspondingly sad, grotesque, satirical, humorous,

<sup>29</sup> For a more detailed exploration of melancholy and the artistic process, see Julia Kristeva’s *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*.

angry, warm, and sober. The possibility of melancholy is therefore multifaceted: the reader's vague sense of melancholy is stimulated by way of textual and tonal hints and suggestions, but this stimulation is simultaneously contradicted by other aesthetic themes and images, a fact the titular allusion seeks to sustain. The mother imagery, especially the phantasmatic figure, and the evocation of sad and indifferent emotions—"uvedkomande rørsler" [irrelevant feelings] (104) and "døv kjensle" [deaf emotion] (104)—are motifs that can embody the term "melancholy." However, it is important to stress the suggestive nature of these images. Lunden's poetry rejects firm categorization; its focus and interest are instead the tentative investigation of various conditions and phenomena. The lack of chronological composition disrupts the static and repetitive rhythm of melancholy while the maternal images imply a deep dependence on the mother, enhancing the themes of separation and identity.

## The Female Voice

In *Gjenkjennelsen*, Lunden demonstrates a more explicit political engagement than is exhibited in her earlier work. This engagement does not result in poems that are proclamative or prescriptive. On the contrary, while some politically engaged literature of the 1970s was didactic and simplifying in its social analysis, Lunden's contribution in 1982 is instead a recurrent reflection on gendered systems of power and on each gender's responsibility for such systems. Several poems do exhibit, however, the appellative structure common with much politically oriented literature, including poetry, which addresses itself to an implied reader through the use of the direct "du" [you] in the text and emphasizes how language is both performative and productive in the creation of a reality. The following poem provides a subtle communication of the ambiguities in language and an ironic comment on a quotation from a Dylan text (from the album *Blonde on Blonde*, 1966):

Det heilt spesielle ved  
deg



det heilt spesielle ved oss kvinner  
at kven som helst kan halde oss fast i bildet  
av det spesielle

you've got to be goodlooking 'cause  
you're so hard to see?  
(153)

[The very special thing about  
you  
the very special thing about us women  
is that anyone can fixate us in the image  
of the very special

you've got to be goodlooking 'cause  
you're so hard to see?]

The poem begins by pointing at the uniqueness of every individual. As it continues, however, it contradicts this prior assertion as it implies that all women have something in common. How can they simultaneously exist as unique and as part of a cohesive, singular identity? By quoting the popular Dylan song, Lunden stresses the fact that the media produces a double message wherein women are told to “be goodlooking” in a way that meets general standards and ideals. As a consequence, women are caught in a trap in which they attempt to find their individual identity in looking like everybody else. Ironically, when they succeed, the loss of their actual individuality results in a version of social myopia, where the generically beautiful woman fades from view, melding into the undistinguished mass of “goodlooking”-ness.

On the other hand, there is little comfort in complaining:

Viss du seier at ting er så og så ille  
har du ikkje sagt noe anna enn  
at ting er så og så ille  
Viss du seier at du er så og så undertrykt

så vil du sannsynlegvis lykkast  
med akkurat det

Vil du bli ei undertrykt jente  
skal du seie at du er ei undertrykt jente  
du vil ganske enkelt bli tatt  
på ordet (140)

[If you say things are as bad as all that  
you've only really said  
that things are as bad as all that

If you say you are oppressed  
you will probably succeed  
in just that

If you want to be an oppressed woman  
you must say you are an oppressed woman  
and you will quite simply  
be taken at your word]

Perhaps we may read a more complex attitude into the poem than the straightforward messages it undeniably communicates. To begin, the text can be read as a commentary on the performative power of language. To be an “undertrykt kvinne” [oppressed woman] is to *say* that one is one. To say that one is an “undertrykt kvinne” is to perform an act, to present oneself as the oppressed person—this act will in turn effectuate one’s oppression. By highlighting the performative nature of language and gender, the poem implies that there is the possibility of changing the situation, or at least challenging it. If one stops saying that one is oppressed, then recognition of the speaking self as someone other than an oppressed woman is possible for both the speaker and her audience.

Secondly, the poem itself performs an act just as it addresses its audience: “you.” As a woman, I deeply sense that the text is speaking directly to me. It tells me something about what I ought not to do

with language, and it informs me of the effects of my speech on my identity. The authoritative voice speaking is both wholly ethical and political in its directives. Its performance encourages me to imitate its discursive structure; it provides an example that I am invited to duplicate, follow, or even dispute. It is a powerful voice, and it is its very power that opens a space for me to countersign, to make a response in my own language.<sup>30</sup>

The relation between gender and language continues to run throughout Lunden's *Gjenkjennelsen*. The following poem thematizes the power of language to constitute the individual.

Du må bestemme deg nå  
om du vil snakke  
eller om du vil overlate til språket  
å uttale kven du er

ditt hemmelege ord er  
ikkje noe hemmeleg ord, det tilhøyrer  
oss alle (141)

[You must make up your mind now  
if you want to talk  
or if you will leave it to language  
to pronounce who you are

your secret word is  
not a secret word, it belongs  
to us all]

A strong, demanding poetic voice urges the “you” to be decisive and outspoken. To speak is a matter of will. Certainly we can read this poem as a commentary on the tradition of silent women. Historically, women have had a significantly weaker public voice than that of

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<sup>30</sup> This discussion concerning language, gender, and performance is indebted to Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

men, a circumstance that has contributed greatly to the powerlessness of women. Silence, precisely due to its attribution of absence or anonymity to the human being, has been idealized and enforced as a female virtue and even requirement. The other side of the equation, which has been thoroughly substantiated in recent feminist research, is the ability of women to develop other strategies that ensure their voice will be heard after all.

An interesting aesthetic aspect of this issue is that of the “mute female” motif in art. There is a poetic tradition that celebrates silence over speech. In so doing, poets regularly attribute feminine qualities and gender to the mute “thing.” We recall John Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn”<sup>31</sup> and then direct our attention to Barbara Johnson’s excellent essay “Muteness Envy,” where she discusses this phenomenon in a reading of Jane Campion’s film *The Piano* (1993). The mute female character in the film (played by Holly Hunter) is clearly a victim within patriarchal, economic, and sexual negotiations, but she also uses the piano as her powerful voice. “Since muteness envy seems to be a feature of canonical poetry written by men, could it somehow play into the question of sexual difference,” Johnson asks.<sup>32</sup>

Implicit in Lunden’s poem we also recognize a distinctive attitude toward language that accentuates how the subject is constituted through language in an inter-subjective and social setting. It is therefore necessary to speak in order to be a subject and take part in the signifying process. Language is by definition a common commodity—it is not a “secret,” but rather a creation formed by people and thus is constantly changing. When we become gendered subjects, we are at the same time subjected to language. This linguistic gendering demands a conscious response regarding the implications involved in being a gendered person. I am a woman, certainly, but if I do not intentionally contribute to the production of linguistic meaning then language itself will control me.

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<sup>31</sup> “Thou still unravished bride of quietness / Thou foster child of silence and slow time” (1820).

<sup>32</sup> Barbara Johnson, *Muteness Envy* 132.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Lunden, *Essays*.

In a collection of essays published the same year as *Gjenkjennelsen*, Lunden reflects on the relationship between gender and language. She views poetry as a unique voice in the public arena, a voice with the potential to reach beyond rational and technical language, a voice able to enlighten things dwelling in the shadows. In an interview with the author Arild Stubhaug, Lunden states that women must learn to use their voice and not only blame men for the masculine domination in society. Additionally, in the essay “Angsten for mannen i gata” [The Fear of the Man in the Street] she discusses an article by the Icelandic author Svava Jakobsdóttir, where she criticizes the myth of the violent man and the non-violent woman.<sup>33</sup>

Lunden’s attitude here can be seen as a critique of a misunderstood idealization of women and can be traced in part back to the feminist movement that contextualizes *Gjenkjennelsen*. If it is radical to be a woman, Lunden asks, what, then, is a radical woman? Her question is a crucial one if we are to understand what drives Lunden so often to turn her critical eye upon women themselves. The act of questioning the radical female identity also implies the fact that Lunden is fully aware of the divergent meanings grounding the concept of “woman” itself. Accordingly, another poem from *Gjenkjennelsen* deals with the problems and taboos in the female and feminist traditions.

Sviket av døtrene  
mobbinga av systrene  
den lufta vi kvinner pustar  
i, det unemnelege

Det kvinnelege tabu er  
kjønn? Ja, og vold

Så lenge den kvinnelege vold  
er tabu  
vil det kvinnelege arbeid vere diskvalifiserande  
vil den kvinnelege prostitusjon blomstre (159)

[The betrayal of the daughters  
the harassing of the sisters  
the air we women  
breathe, the unmentionable

The female taboo is  
sex? Yes, and violence

As long as the female violence  
is taboo  
female work will count against us  
female prostitution will blossom]

The poem questions women's behavior toward each other, both historically and in the present. "Sviket av døtrene" [The betrayal of the daughters] brings to mind different types of discrimination and abuse. For example, in many cultures there is a long-standing tradition of marriages of convenience, often supported by the mothers, and which in some societies is still ongoing today. Sexual mutilation is, of course, another disturbingly all-too-relevant topic. It is still widely practiced and often enforced by other women. Today these topics are discussed publicly to a much greater extent than was common at the time of the publication of Lunden's poems. Due to the immigration of persons from a variety of cultures to Norway and other Scandinavian countries, Scandinavia also has witnessed several cases of gender-based discrimination anchored in tradition, including murder.

Lunden speaks of the taboos among women. She thereby gives voice to the silent sexual knowledge that is not transferred from mother to daughter, the violent traditions produced by the irrational fear of sex and the patriarchal need for control. As long as the taboos remain taboos, the violence will continue, according to Lunden. But why does she then connect this taboo to the themes of work and prostitution at the end of the poem? Perhaps it is because the types of violence and power the poem deals with establish a frame of reference in which women's bodies are commodities—literally objects for pur-

chase. As long as this framework exists, women's "arbeid" [work] is closely tied to their bodies and thus is disqualified from attaining any "real" political or economic significance in the masculine world. Put another way, perhaps the aesthetic connection between taboo, work, and prostitution as developed by Lunden seeks to foreground the implicit disembodiment of the masculine economy: feminine work is invalid in this economic system due to the physical location of its value, namely in the female body.

Regardless of how we answer these questions, Lunden's poem challenges us with its untraditional manner of thinking within a feminist context, forcing us to rethink and perhaps even revise some statements that may be too obvious and biased. Whether we agree with her suggestions or not, the poem urges women to articulate such taboos and bring an end to the inherent violence in some female traditions. Embedded in each of these poems about gender, language, and the female voice is a basic notion of how the human being is dominated by and subjected to structures of power. At the same time, it must be emphasized that the poems take as their point of departure the individual, her experiences, responsibilities, and possibilities. In an interview Lunden maintains,

Mange forskarar—frå Nietzsche til Foucault og Lacan—har vore opptekne av dette—kven som ranar til seg herredømmet over språket i eit samfunn, og dermed over tankar og verdier. Men om ein er medviten om dette, så kan ein da velje å presse fram si eiga stemme.<sup>34</sup>

[Many theorists—from Nietzsche to Foucault and Lacan—have been devoted to the question of who it is that takes control of the language in a society and hence of thoughts and values. But those who are aware of these processes can choose to push forward their own voice.]

Accordingly, the lyrical voice fails to exhibit a defeatist attitude, but

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<sup>34</sup> Lunden, *Essays* 37.

rather provides a continuous reminder of the responsibility necessary for the individual's own engagement.

Du må bestemme deg nå  
kven du vil vere, du veit storparten  
av det som blir sagt ligg tungt i sjøen  
som ein vilje til å dukke

språket som søkker deg djupt ned  
til kvelning

Du må bestemme om du vil bli noen  
uttalt nå, du må skifte språk  
for ditt bare liv (142)

[You must make up your mind now  
who you want to be, you know that most  
of what is said lies deep in the sea  
like a desire to sink

the language that ducks you deep down  
till you choke

You must make up your mind if you want to be someone  
expressed now, you must change your language  
for your dear life]

In a didactic but metaphorical mood, the poetic voice asserts that spoken language has a deadly power. It lies “tungt i sjøen / som ein vilje til å dukke” [deep in the sea / like the will to sink]. This language is the language of “the other,” and Lunden metaphorically emphasizes its strength and capacity for violence. The second fragmentary stanza strengthens this notion, suggesting that language is able to strangulate a person. These lines create a nightmarish image of the power of language to define, control, and kill. While wounding words have caused physical death, Lunden most likely alludes here to the self-destructive, pathological borders of language.



Lunden later considers a possible objection to this apparently paranoid analysis of an individual's relationship with—and subjugation to—language. She comments here on the endless chatter that she finds in women's private communication:

Men kvinner seier jo alt  
til kvarandre  
håret, tennene, mennene og menstruasjonen  
og det er ingen ende

seier alt  
og går heim til ingenting?

ein samtale så bort i veggene?

som å snakke til veggen  
som ikkje er der (149)

[But women tell each other  
everything  
hair, teeth, men and menstruation

no end to it  
tell everything  
and go home to nothing?

a conversation so senseless?

like talking sense to a wall  
that isn't there]

Women do converse explains this other voice, but the concern is a question of topic: what do women discuss? Ironically the poem itself gives voice to this feminine chat regarding intimate, private, personal matters—talk about “everything” and “nothing.” The dramatic atmosphere of the previous poem is here turned into humor—even

the puns underline the emptiness inside this sort of communicative practice. However, we must ask: why is this conversation so “bort i veggene” [senseless]? What is wrong with intimate talk, and why does the (masculine) world fail to legitimize its discursive worth? For that matter, why is this intimate conversation categorized as female? Perhaps the poem’s irony references this opposition to women’s talk when depicting it as “som å snakke til veggen / som ikkje er der” [like talking sense to a wall / that isn’t there].

Directly after this poem follows another that focuses on an opposite space: the public arena.

Den store stillstand som er  
kvinnene

Det kvinnelege som ligg i stor og stum  
sirkel om det mannlege  
og gjerne på ministernivå (149)

[That great standstill that is  
women

The womanly that lies in a great silent  
circle around the masculine  
not least at ministerial level]

Lunden’s diagnosis here is not optimistic. Words including “stillstand” [standstill] and “stor og stum / sirkel” [great silent / circle] are directly linked to women. Are women always passive, essentially receptive in their mode of being? Has the feminist movement failed? Has the first female Prime Minister failed as a woman? Is her adjectival femininity (“kvinnelege” [womanly]) a great silent circle that surrounds, unseen, her masculine way of acting? Is it necessary to compromise one’s womanhood in order to succeed in a male power hierarchy?<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Gro Harlem Brundtland (b. 1939) was appointed prime minister of Norway in 1981, the youngest person and the first woman ever to hold this office. Brundtland

The poem raises provocative questions and serves as a reminder of how easy it is to judge feminist success by the political offices held by women. But it also reinscribes the old habit of providing a gendered judgment of a female politician. Lunden apparently offers a feminist critique of “state feminism,” but her claims are certainly also disputable as the constative utterances can authorize and cement prejudices.<sup>36</sup> A critique of “det kvinnelege” [the womanly] may be radical in its content, but conservative in its sustaining of an illusion that all women share a certain “womanliness.” And yet, we cannot escape this problematic use of language because language itself is iterative: signs are constituted and identified by the fact that they are repeatable. This paradox captures a dilemma inherent in the feminist efforts to make a difference as we are necessarily obliged to reiterate historical and linguistic conventions in order to displace them.

Is this poem then nothing but a joke? Perhaps the entire poem is a humorous commentary on the interplay of prejudices regarding femininity and masculinity? The bodily and sexual connotations underlying the abstract political concepts and the “leap” to the ministerial level hint at a carnivalesque style. Such a possibility allows Lunden’s voice to reveal itself as ambiguous and parodic. This interpretative riddle would perhaps be easier to understand in a live performance (and Lunden is a good comedian). The poem certainly provides a useful example of how written language reveals itself as ultimately resistant to unambiguous readings, how it signifies in multi-

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served for two additional periods as prime minister (from 1986–89 and 1990–96), the head of the Norwegian government for over 10 years. Brundtland also chaired the World Commission on Environment and Development, which published its report—*Our Common Future*—in April 1987. The Commission’s recommendations led to the Earth Summit, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. In January 1998, Brundtland was nominated as Director General of the World Health Organization by the Executive Board of the WHO and was elected to this position by the World Health Assembly in May 1998. She stepped down in 2003.

<sup>36</sup> The concept of “state feminism” was coined by the social scientist Helga Hernes who analyzed the close ties between governmental policy and feminism in Scandinavia in the 1970s and ’80s. Gro Harlem Brundtland is often seen as a key figure behind this strategy.

ple ways, and how it constructs meaning while simultaneously suspending and changing it.

A final poem here will allow us to further examine Lunden's treatment of the political and feminism.

Den kvinnelege styrke er ennå nesten  
alltid tvetydig

Er det fordi den ikkje har innebygd opprør mot  
makt i seg?

den er ei fullmakt

Er det derfor vi liksom ikkje riktig orkar den? (171)

[Female strength is still nearly  
always ambiguous

Is it because it has no built-in revolt  
against power?  
it is an authorization

Is that why we sort of cannot really stand it?]

The poem opens with a thesis: "Den kvinnelege styrke er ennå nesten / alltid tvetydig" [Female strength is still nearly / always ambiguous]. Is Lunden right to make this claim? When recalling politicians such as Gro Harlem Brundtland, Margaret Thatcher, or Hillary Clinton, is not the tendency to be inclined toward skepticism due to the (unexpected?) combination of female gender and political power? Does power make men more attractive and women less so? And does the patriarchal society not meet these successful women with a wide range of sexist rhetoric and prejudice from a variety of sources? Obviously. The old rhetoric that constructs women as the weaker sex is still at work deep in our collective unconscious.

But then Lunden continues: "Er det fordi den ikkje har innebygd

opprør mot / makt i seg?” [Is it because it has no built-in revolt / against power?]. Is she not turning things upside down, inverting our political expectations? Is it not the internalized revolt with its skepticism against power that makes female strength ambiguous? At this point Lunden’s poetic method reveals itself. Her Socratic questioning forces us to reconsider our political and aesthetic assumptions regarding feminism and power. In this case, the questions themselves are perhaps more important than the answers. Consider: should female strength necessarily include a revolt against male power?

When Lunden then states “den er ei fullmakt” [it is an authorization], she raises the underlying political theme to the surface. Female strength is characterized as an authorization, reminding us that the premise of any power lies in its ability to effect change outside the self: power is an authorization to execute policy on behalf of someone else. Power is a phenomenon “guaranteed by the whole group or by a recognized institution,” says Pierre Bourdieu, and “it rests fundamentally on the belief of an entire group.”<sup>37</sup> This political authorization is one reason why power is, in fact, powerful. From this perspective, the conclusion of the poem makes sense: “Er det derfor vi liksom ikkje riktig orkar den?” [Is this why we sort of cannot really stand it?]. A possible interpretation would be that female strength is essentially ambiguous because it does not sufficiently question the concept of power. Power understood as an authorization to act on behalf of others (here characterized as majorities) is likely to exclude marginal groups and individuals. And is this exclusion itself precisely the reason we “cannot really stand it”? Lunden here argues then in favor of power as a political structure inherently at play, inverting common expectations of power as impervious into a conception of power through the recognition of powerlessness. In doing so, Lunden rethinks the structure of political feminism—she questions the political validity of a power that is (or at least believes itself to be) immune to opposition.

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<sup>37</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power* 125.



## 2. Places: Sites of Memory and Reflection

What is a place, and what does place signify in a poetic context? What kinds of places are poetic? According to strong currents in contemporary philosophy, place is not only a localizable site placed in time and space, but a mental intersection between people and their physical surroundings. In his influential history of the philosophy of place, Edward S. Casey maintains that place offers a pattern for thinking.<sup>38</sup> In the tension between place and body, thought occurs as a dynamic event and as a process; it is not absolute, but subjected to historical transformations. According to this reasoning, places are more happenings than things. Even if they are completed as constructed sites, they change materially over time and they continue to occur or happen as a place.

Place is essential to Eldrid Lunden's poetry, although its meanings and implications shift throughout her works. Using the frame of a dynamic, relational understanding of its phenomenology, I will interpret a selection of Lunden's most developed (and dissimilar) places: landscapes, places of imprisonment, excavation sites, sacred buildings, and churchyards. These are main sites of experience and poetic examination in Lunden's work, and the poet offers the places to the reader as clusters of signification within a context of a condensed historicity loaded with personal and collective memory. The poetics of place in Lunden's work confirms Gaston Bachelard's assertion that pictures and places, more than plots and temporalities, are the means by which we remember the past: "Memory—what a strange thing it is!—does not record concrete duration, in the Bergsonian sense of the word. [...] The finest specimens of fossilized duration concretized as a result of long sojourn, are to be found in and through space."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*.

<sup>39</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places* 9.

## Landscapes

The scenery from Lunden's childhood—the coastal landscape and its wet climate—remains an important force in her texts. Through each of her ten volumes of poetry, we sense a strong bodily and mental attachment to nature and a fundamental understanding of the human as touched and created by its physical surroundings. This understanding is perhaps most extensively explored in Lunden's early works, where nature acts as a site of powerful emotions, peaceful sensitivity, and remembrance. The later works can be read as containing more philosophical reflections on nature as a place for perception, mental projection, and artistic interpretation.

Let me begin these readings of place in Lunden's poetry with a poem from her second volume, *Inneringa*, which has a strong emphasis on the connection between body and nature.

Dei hadde grunnvatnet høgt i kroppen,  
dei sat på laus torv  
og såg dei giktbrotnne åkrane  
skylle ut i havet,  
dei lærde at regnets og Vårherres  
vegar er uransakelege. (29)

[The groundwater stood high in their bodies,  
they sat on loose turf  
and watched their rheumatic acres  
wash into the sea,  
they learnt that rain and Our Lord  
move in mysterious ways.]

People and nature are intimately intertwined in Lunden's language. The word "grunnvatnet" [groundwater] is clearly associated with its denotative significance. And yet, the connotative strength of the word evokes a greater sense of water as a basic element in daily human life and as an integral, even if hidden, part of the depicted landscape. Perhaps, given Lunden's consistent concern with gender and the feminine experience, it also alludes to another water hidden under a



human landscape: the amniotic fluid. The expression “høgt i kroppen” [high in their bodies] emphasizes water as literally embedded in the body. The living arrangements are unsafe: “sat på laus torv” [sat on loose turf]—“laus” [loose] because the water dissolves the ground and “laus” [loose] because the land provides an unstable harvest. These people have worked, developed rheumatism, and must observe how the “giktbrotna åkrane” [rheumatic acres] are washed into the sea. In its conclusion, the poem utilizes a slightly altered, but familiar, saying: “regnets og Vårherres / vegar er uransakelege” [rain and Our Lord / move in mysterious ways]. By means of a rhetoric that relates nature to the body—nature is humanized and vice versa—Lunden creates a basic intimacy between the two. The poem makes it clear that a long life in the fields leaves its mark on the bodies, and that the work of the water on the soil conditions their way of life.

A place—here, place meaning nature, landscape, and climate—functions as a direct effect on people’s senses, perceptions, faith, and ideas. The material conditions, including everything that constitutes culture, are decisive for their belief and behavior. After having inscribed nature on the human being and the human being on nature, Lunden catches some of them as they break out of a seemingly deterministic situation. A girl (“ho” [she]) suddenly tears herself away, running as if intoxicated with a feeling of freedom and bodily relief:

ho som plutselig  
 rak laus, sprang langs liene  
 heile hausten  
 i ein falma bomullskjole,  
 sprang og sprang  
 på tvers av elvane  
 bekkane, til ei underleg  
 stri væte  
 braut fram i graset  
 overalt (38)

[she who suddenly  
 cut loose, ran along the hillside

all fall  
in a faded cotton dress  
ran and ran  
across the rivers  
the streams, until a strange  
harsh wetness  
broke out in the grass  
everywhere]

All the previous nature poems in the volume, which are not concerned with individuals, use repetitive patterns to produce a stern situation where the individual is either generalized by means of the pronoun “dei” [they] or absorbed by nature. Here, “ho” breaks out and comes into sight with a dynamic body, full of energy. The rhythm and the tempo of the poem support the liberation that is taking place. The metaphors for time and space—“heile hausten” [all fall], “langs liene” [along the hillside], “på tvers av elvane” [across the rivers]—indicate that this event is not random or short-lived, but rather an ongoing process. The poem’s end also signals the difficulty of this process; the word “stri” [harsh] is applied to the wet grass itself, an anthropomorphizing move that indicates the possibility for struggle. At the least, it indicates a basic connection between the human body and the landscape that is repeatedly put into focus in Lunden’s work.

## Places of Imprisonment

An important aspect of Lunden’s poetry of place is the relationship between place and person that is saturated with power, isolation, and fear. Place as a site of imprisonment is a familiar topic in literature, mythology, and art history, as well as a productive point of departure for philosophical reflections on restricted conditions in life in general. The motif of imprisonment is particularly evident in *Slik Sett*, where references to the Ariadne myth guide the reader into multiple intertextualities, including Ibsen’s *Når vi døde vågner* [*When We Dead Awaken*] (1899), Per Olof Sundman’s *Ingenjör Andrées luftfärd* [*Mr. Andrée’s Airship Voyage*] (1967), and Nietzsche’s *Götterdämmerung* [*Twilight of the Idols*] (1889). A common

denominator among these works is the tragic split between ambition and disappointment, between hubris and disillusion. Although it is not always easy to disentangle the Ariadne thread throughout the book, the sounds from these victims of modernity resonate with Lunden's own incarceration plot, which has a more prosaic and less heroic character. It develops around an address, "Fangens veg" [Prisoner's Street] 14:

Noen hadde sagt det ofte nok at  
ho budde i Fangens veg 14. Noen hadde  
ofte nok kryssa opp framfor porten og lagt igjen  
full beskjed om det som ikkje let seg skjule

Noen hadde gått forbi Fangens veg, og noen  
hadde vendt tilbake til Fangens veg. Det er dette  
som gjer at ein aldri blir heilt sikker på  
kva som skjuler seg bak porten i Fangens veg 14 (295)

[People had told her often enough that  
she lived in Prisoner's Street 14. People had  
often turned up by the gate and left  
clear notice of what could not be concealed

Some had passed Prisoner's Street, and some  
had returned to Prisoner's Street. It is this  
that makes one uncertain as to  
what is hidden behind the gate in Prisoner's Street 14.]

The poem stresses how the condition of being a prisoner is constructed through the repetition of the pronoun "noen" [people / some]: "Noen hadde sagt ..." [People had told her]; "Noen hadde / ofte nok [...] lagt igjen / full beskjed" [People had / often [...] left clear notice]; "Noen hadde gått forbi [...] og noen / hadde vendt tilbake" [Some had passed [...] and some / had returned]. In other words, the prisoner seems to result from the speech and actions of an ambiguous "noen."<sup>40</sup>

As the inhabitant of “Fangens veg 14” is a woman, we can see a connection with *Gjenkjennelsen*, where Lunden explores women’s subjection as an effect of speech acts. To live in “Fangens veg” must be read as a kind of imprisonment. However, being a prisoner does not mean that there is a clear understanding of why the imprisonment has occurred or what the implications of this action are. Neither are the specifics regarding the captivity and what it actually consists of necessarily apparent. On the one hand, the poem may be read as a feminist critique of how certain cultural mechanisms produce female prisoners. In an earlier poem, Lunden describes captivity as a way of living in an internalized mentality, like having a wall inside one’s head. As in the myth of Ariadne where the island can be metaphorically interpreted as an isolated place, “Fangens veg 14” may not only be an address, but a condition. In this case, the woman’s imprisonment results from the construction of femininity; it is possible that the woman was seduced or otherwise forced to accept the imprisonment as natural and unalterable.

On the other hand, the theme may be more philosophical in nature: perhaps as an allegory of the reading process itself. In this case, the poem can be seen as providing commentary on the universal, recurring questions concerning the meanings “behind” the signs. This allegory provides a possible connection between Lunden’s text and Kafka’s parable “Vor dem Gesetz” [Before the Law] (1915), in which the human being is confronted with his own longing for essential meaning. Kafka’s man approaches the closed gate and the gatekeeper, but is never allowed to step inside, even though the gate is meant for him. In Jacques Derrida’s well-known interpretation, this story reveals the human desire for meaning and understanding, as well as the process in which the anticipation of a certain meaning produces the meaning itself.<sup>41</sup> Inspired by these possible allusions, we may read Lunden’s poem as an allegory of the way we continually hover between knowing and not knowing. In this allegory, literature acts as a primary guide to help us in our ignorance. Such a read-

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<sup>40</sup> “Fangens veg” may also allude to the author Ronald Fangen (1895-1946).

<sup>41</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Before the Law.”

ing creates an especially expansive version of the prisoner motif and points to an analysis where imprisonment signifies the state of being caught in a hermeneutic aporia. This aporia is produced by an expression that is present to the senses (words) and that contains a meaning not obvious to the intellect (significance).

Together, the poems in this section call for multiple interpretations, especially when read as a chain of events. In this narrativized structure, the poems appear to deal with a man who is kept prisoner by his own confused ideas and ambivalent desire. The section title here reads “Ein heil okse og ein halv visjon (for all verdens Tesevs)” [A whole ox and a half vision (for the Theseuses in this world)]. How shall we read this cryptic allusion to the minotaur myth, where the monster, as we know, was half ox and half man? Do the allusions here to the monster hint at dangerous and untamed powers?

The text opens up a view into a mind on the edge of destruction: “Eit drap ville gjort han godt?” (297) [A murder might have done him good?]. He sits on the bus fantasizing and is “underlagt krefter” [subject to forces], but the trivialities of life only provoke disgust and nausea. Outside of “Fangens veg 14” he considers turning around, thinking perhaps no one lives there, and occupying himself with irrational questions. His condition is expressed in terms of a fall: he is “outside of” and “down into” himself. When finally the woman comes out of “Fangens veg 14” only to throw away garbage, the disappointment is “enorm” (298) [enormous]; it looks as if the fascination with the unknown woman suddenly arrives at an impasse.

My attempt here to paraphrase the “narrative” is most likely too explicit. The allusion to the monster in the labyrinth does, nevertheless, lead the reader toward a reading that makes the man into a modern variant of an alienated individual, imprisoned in his own desire and governed by conflicting impulses. Daily events are no longer sufficient; he is forced to follow his dreams and voyeuristic tendencies. He confuses both himself and others, and ends up seeing himself from the outside, as if the scene were a film: “Slik sett hadde han sett nok. Alle dine auge har sett deg, tenker han” [Seen that way he had seen enough. All your eyes have seen you, he thinks] (299). From this perspective “Fangens veg 14” may be interpreted as a pro-

jection of the man's fascination with the unknown woman—a fascination that fractures when the desire is fulfilled and the woman appears.

Among the texts that deal with the theme of imprisonment, both physical and mental, the only one—in my opinion—that changes complete, devastating isolation into a space for reflection, is the poem about the Swedish engineer André. His airship voyage over the polar ice in 1897 failed disastrously, and like Rubek and Irene in Ibsen's *Når vi døde vågner* [*When We Dead Awaken*], he and his two companions end their lives buried under ice and snow. (The historical event occurred at the same time that Ibsen wrote his drama.) Lunden's poem focuses on the continual struggle André faces against the ice (she writes his name without the second "e"):

Ingeniør André løfta inn i isen  
Ingeniør André løfta ut av isen  
Ingeniør Andrés vandring mot polen  
mens isen under han skrur sakte, men sikkert  
tilbake til utgangspunktet

Dei nedfrosne spora etter ingeniør André  
som blir funne hundre år etter og hundre  
år etter. Ei fillete dagbok og ein siste levande  
pust som blar (318)

[Mr. André lifted into the ice  
Mr. André lifted out of the ice  
Mr. André's march towards the Pole  
while the ice beneath him churns slowly, but surely  
back towards its point of departure

The frozen traces of Mr. André  
found a hundred years later and a hundred  
years later. A tattered diary and a last living  
breath turning the page]

The expedition was the first attempt to reach the North Pole by airship, and it was an event followed by great enthusiasm, patriotism, and interest by the media, especially in Sweden. After only two days the airship crashed: Andrée and his colleagues tried to walk out on foot. Remnants from the expedition—clothes, frozen bodies, film negatives, and diary notes—were found on White Island, Svalbard, in 1930. In retrospect, the critics have stressed Andrée's naïve optimism, his blind belief in modern technology, and his lack of respect for the powers of nature. In addition, critics saw the expedition (and its fate) as resulting from nationalistic and masculine ideals of heroism.

Lunden's poem draws attention to the rhythmic Sisyphean-like movements that characterize Andrée's fight against the ice and to the traces he left behind. The poem itself is descriptive in form, but the tragic thematic dimensions of the event resonate throughout the entire collection, and especially in the juxtaposition to Ibsen's work. In both cases, death in the ice symbolizes existential loneliness and human weakness; the extreme consequences of a fatal choice add perspective to the uncompromising need for hubris.

## Excavation Sites

*Til stades: Tekstar om erindring og gløymse* makes a journey (or many journeys), to areas around the Mediterranean. These journeys simultaneously represent an exploratory dive into the collective past of humanity. The archaeological site becomes a unique place where concrete traces of lives lived meet the personal experiences and expectations of a contemporary visitor. These poems also call for reflection on the interpretational and scientific processes tied to the understanding of the past.

Two of the sections of the text deal with archaeological excavations. The first examines the Etruscan areas and the second contemplates places buried by the volcanic eruption in 79, Herculaneum and Pompeii. These excavation sites share the death motif: the Etruscan sites contain beautifully decorated graves, while the victims of Vesuvius were preserved in stone, both whole and as body castings. Lunden uses nature as a mediating approach to these sites of past

lives and preserved death. The dynamics between life and death appear in a short poem that serves as an essence of the place:

Det er stille og mjukt som gras  
på etruskaranes graver (342)

[It is quiet and soft as grass  
on the Etruscan's graves]

Nature functions as a quiet life around inanimate objects, locating the remembrances from the past in an actual, dynamic context. The past *occurs* as place.

Lunden refers to D.H. Lawrence as a conversation partner in her reflections about the Etruscan burial grounds. His book, *Sketches of Etruscan Places*, from 1932 is a classic in the literature about this past culture that left behind so many enigmas and marvelous pieces of art.

Fuglar på flukt gjennom dødsrommet

er D.H. Lawrence sitt bilde av the etruskian way

“but if you are content with just a sense of the quick ripple of life, then here it is” (339)

[Birds in flight through the death chamber

is D.H. Lawrence's image of the Etruscan Way

“but if you are content with just a sense of the quick ripple of life, then here it is”]

The Etruscans' may have sustained only a short presence in history, but their subsequent subterranean existence in ancient graves continues to resonate within the modern consciousness. The graves act as



sites that after having become a “quick ripple” on the surface of life, once more consign them to the realm of death. However, in spite of the brevity of their historical existence, the Etruscans produced a lasting contribution to the history of art and to the history of honoring of the dead. Lunden notes that the Etruscan sepulchers held beautiful paintings. These paintings were meant to change the last hour together with the dead into a celebratory feast: “Alt det beste livet kunne gi har dei vilja framstille her. Vakker natur. Sol og vind. Fuglar i flukt og delfinar i sprang. Jakt, idrett, erotikk” (341) [They have wished to depict all the best things in life. The beauties of nature. Sun and wind. Birds in flight and leaping dolphins. Hunting, sport and erotic love.] The dynamic offering celebrates the aesthetic quality of both visual representation and life itself. Similarly, Lawrence writes about the Etruscans’ relationship to birds:

To them, hot-blooded birds flew through the living universe as feelings and premonitions fly through the breast of a man, or as thoughts fly through the mind. In their flight, the suddenly-roused birds, or the steady, far-coming birds moved wrapped in a deeper consciousness, in the complex destiny of all things.<sup>42</sup>

In both texts, what seems to interest Lunden are the greetings between the Etruscan and the Vesuvian victims and our modern mentality. Lawrence, as an intellectual, functions as a mediator between the contemporary eye and the past. Lunden cites Lawrence’s description of a shepherd at the bar in a café in Cerveteri, where Lawrence had to wait before going to the excavation area. “Lawrence meiner han representerer ein mannstype som nesten blei utrydda under krigen [Lawrence thinks he represents a type of male that was almost wiped out during the war]: ‘They can’t survive, the faun-faced men, with their pure outlines and strange non moral calm. Only the deflowered faces survive’” (338).

Why does Lunden choose this quotation? And what is its connec-

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<sup>42</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Sketches of Etruscan Places* 61.

tion to Etruscan art? These questions are challenging, especially because Lunden calls the story “ein digresjon eller kva det nå er” (338) [a digression or something]. Perhaps the focus on “the faun-faced man” concerns the ties between the present and the past, between the Etruscan wall decorations and the British author’s identification with a modern male character. Does Lawrence fear that he too will disappear? He is a man, who, with his faun-like face, is also mythical. War has removed his innocence, says Lawrence, and he metaphorically contrasts the sexual attraction of the man with the decay of moral responsibility during the Second World War. At the same time, however, the man appears to transcend morality, perhaps revisiting an older pre-moral existence.

There is a melancholy side to Lawrence’s reflection; he mourns the loss of the beautiful man whom he recognizes in the idealized shepherd in the café. Lunden quotes Lawrence, but she does not interpret him. I read this anecdote as a model of the ways in which the past may be faced, namely as an inevitable attitude toward one’s own historic experience. Through the prism of our reality we observe how the life of the past expands; simultaneously, our losses and our sorrow manifest themselves as possible realities in past lives. The faun-like man is visible in the Etruscan wall paintings and the ghost of the man in the café results in a vivid confrontation with Lawrence’s own dreams and disappointments.

In a longer description of the Etruscan graves, Lunden underscores how the tomb functions as a station between life and death, similar to function of the café in Lawrence’s narrative.

Felles for dekorasjonane er at dei (truleg) vitnar om ei tru på at gravrommet var eit mellomstadium på vegen mot dødsriket. På den veggen som vende mot inngangspartiet var det alltid måla ei lukka dør. Underforstått: her må vi stanse (340)

[A common theme for the decorations is that they (most likely) testify to a belief in the tomb as an intermediate stage on the way to the kingdom of the dead. On the wall facing the entrance there was always painted a closed door. Saying: go no further.]

The café and the burial chamber both provide possible arenas for an encounter between the past and the present. The faun-man in the café reminds us of the decorations on the chamber walls, which again signify a belief in an afterlife. Both sites provide the author with a reflection on the meaning of the place. Lawrence ponders war and its destructive effect on morality; Lunden imagines that the Etruscans projected a metaphysical meaning onto the painted door in the wall. But the differences in the distance between past and present are also obvious: the reminder of the dead in the café is a product of the author's own associations, while the Etruscans' graveyards serve as concrete witnesses to the ceremonial significance of death.

In the area around Vesuvius we do not find artistically decorated tombs, but rather the remains of whole towns that were buried by the eruptions. Death is a substantial presence in these excavation areas, too, but Lunden lets the dead rest in peace and gives us instead a sober description of the concrete artifacts. These descriptions are only slightly colored by speculations regarding life in antiquity. The strongest impression in Herculaneum comes from the public bath, where Lunden is moved to think of the slaves who were doomed to fill and empty the large pool with water. In Pompeii, the volcanic eruption, lethal from both gas and lava, causes Lunden to associate the event with an atomic explosion. Her visit to the mystery villa leaves her with many enigmas. The only dead person who is granted a place in these reflections on the suddenly extinguished culture is, curiously enough, not dead at all:

Eg møter ein mann med grå, harde auge. Eg vil ha han og tenker: det hjelper ikkje at han har grå, harde auge for eg vil jo ha han. Uansett

Han står og ser størkna og uttrykkslaust på meg. Eg bestemmer meg og snur ansiktet mot han. Let det revne

Han stirer på meg med eit utvida uttrykk i pupillane, men utan at det hånlege og harde forsvinn. Kom, seier han fort og grip handa mi. Og vi går for å finne ein annan stad enn her midt i gata. Vi klatrar oppover ein bratt skråning. Og eg tenker at nå må vi snart vere framme, men så merkar eg

ei grein som har tulla seg kring eine foten. Eg ser ned og prøver å sparke den vekk, men det går ikkje. Då eg ser opp er han forsvunnen

Dette fiksar du ikkje, tenker eg fortvila. Og. Dette må aldri noen få greie på (364)

[I meet a man with gray, hard eyes. I want him and think: it doesn't matter that he has gray, hard eyes because I want him. Regardless

He stands looking at me with a congealed expressionless look. I make up my mind and turn my face towards him. Let it crack up

He stares at me with a widened expression in his pupils, but without losing the mocking harshness. Come, he says quickly and grasps my hand. And we go to find somewhere else than here in the middle of the street. We climb up a steep slope. And I think that we must nearly be there, but then I notice a branch wrapped round one foot. I look down and try to kick it away, but that doesn't work. When I look up he has disappeared

You can't fix this, I despair. And. No one must ever know]

The surprising textual ploy here is not the conventional animation of a dead object, but the animation of a man, now dead, though once alive (in my reading of the text). Through this rhetoric, the text projects an astonishingly dynamic account of the towns that were changed into necropolises. It is as if the recollection of a dead human being is impossible to insert into a discursive space without reviving (or revivifying) the memory. But the real surprise—and humor—in this poem lies in the fact that the man is sexually attractive. In spite of his gray and hard eyes, Eldrid wants him! (I say “Eldrid” well aware of the fact that the text’s “I” is fictive, but I take this identification as an appropriate response to the feminism with which the author herself teases her reader.) Lunden plays a game of seduction with the petrified man who suddenly, for a moment, has become flesh and blood.

It is certainly intriguing to think of these human beings from the

past as living men and women with lusts and longings; the sketch of the man in the kiosk selling postcards with antique, pornographic pictures (366) adds a contemporary frame to the erotic motif. At the same time it is impossible not to see both the mythological and the modern, popular subtext across which Lunden writes her unsuccessful, but far from tragic, love story. The clichéd phrases allude to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. This mythological connection is made explicit in a poem about the couple where Lunden emphasizes the “interesting” death of the beloved wife: “Så død og interessant av dødens makter dobbelt slegen” (394) [So dead and of such interest by death’s own forces doubly slain].

Lunden seems to enjoy reinscribing the implications of the myth in an ordinary, if not banal, context. Her addition of this ironic comment to a motif that has produced a wide range of philosophical consideration regarding desire, death, and art is difficult to interpret definitively. Is it meant to be humorous, or is it a way of exploring the traumatic historical events? In any case, functionally it acts as a means of reducing the distance between the then and the now, between life and death. The absoluteness of death is beyond our capacity to understand; perhaps it is more easily integrated into the mind’s conscious consideration when it is inscribed in familiar narratives. The poetic text, then, relates an encounter with death. Even if death, for a moment, may be stabilized as a seductive, although detached, man, the inherent quality of disappearance in death—to exist as that which no longer exists—remains an ontological puzzle: “Dette må aldri noen få greie på” [No one must ever know].

As we have seen, the excavation sites call forth various responses from the modern poet. They represent a unique atmosphere with a startling beauty joined with horror and death, and create a persuasive reason to reflect on the intensity of their address to body and mind. Through intersecting dialogues between the ancient sites, graves, works of art, the modern visitors, and their texts, Lunden underscores how these specific places work as processes of cultural production.

This aesthetic method of approaching the past is congruent with the arguments presented by Karin Sanders in her article on the

archaeological object in word and image. Material objects produce metaphors according to Sanders, as do scientists and artists in their interpretations of ancient items and excavation sites: culture is a continual negotiation with the changing past. Sanders's conception of memory in terms of material metaphors is a useful model. She reminds us of how Walter Benjamin theorizes memory as a *medium* (complete with its physical connotations) of that which is experienced: "Memory is, he says, a stage for the past just as soil is the site for archaeological excavations."<sup>43</sup> Perhaps it is this underlying physicality evident in the visits to the archaeological sites that inspires Lunden to interpolate her travelogue poems with references to her own childhood—"Tenker på far og hestane hans" [Thinking of father and his horses] (382)—mixing memory, existence, and oblivion together as central issues for our reflection.

## Sacred Buildings

A main motival element of place in *Til stades* is found in the representations of churches and other sacred buildings. These buildings are usually meticulously depicted in prose texts that range from factual accounts to humorous digressions. On the one hand, these churches are seen from a tourist's point of view and are thus met with respect and admiration. On the other hand, they are regularly subjected to an animating gaze, which modifies their solemn strangeness. The sacred buildings impress themselves upon sensitive bodies that then relate their unique perception to prior experiences and familiar architecture. Vast interiors gain a sense of intimacy through the familiarization of the space: for example, the pulpit in the large cathedral in Siena is recast so that it "slyngar seg som ei / bølge nedover i midtskipet før den legg seg til ro på ryggen til fire løver" (356) [billowing like a wave down the nave before it settles on the back of four lions]. Likewise, the distant sanctity of the religious personae is overcome through the humanization of the saints in Notre-dame de Chartres who "smilte og var i riktig godt humør"

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<sup>43</sup> Karin Sanders, "The Archaeological Object in Word and Image" 266. Cf. Walter Benjamin, "Excavation and Memory" 548.

[smiled and were in high spirits] and behaved “høgst ufransk” [in a most un-French manner] (373).

The experiences of the Mediterranean are similarly described as an encounter with something well known that retains its sense of difference. Lunden’s texts often foreground the impression of simultaneously experiencing the familiar and the strange. Differences between the perception of an object via visual or verbal representation versus the complete, physical experience of the “real thing” also forms a prominent theme for Lunden’s reflections. Lunden also considers the admirable extravagance and excess present in Catholic culture. These features, visible in French and Italian religious architecture, form an interpretive context for a renewed visit to the large cathedral in Uppsala, Sweden. Lunden’s text takes as its point of departure a forgetfulness that is suddenly brought into her consciousness by a re-encounter with the Nordic cathedral. Lunden is struck by her poor recollection of this place and wonders why her memories are so faint. She asks how it is possible to describe a church—“Går det an å snakke om ei blond, høgreist og abstrakt kyrkje?” (385) [Can one speak of a blond, tall and abstract church?]

—and then concludes that her ability to perceive must have changed.

Dette hadde eg altså gløymt. Eller. Denne kyrkja fekk eg først auge på etter å ha lytta til dekorasjonane i katolske kyrkjer ei tid. Heftige samtaler mellom helgenar av ulike slag. Tallause bibeltolkingar. Framstillingar av den heilage familie. Deltakarar i eit stort, myldrande fellesskap (385)

[So I had forgotten this. Maybe. I really only noticed this church after having listened for some time to the ornaments in Catholic churches. Spirited conversations between saints of various degrees. Endless biblical interpretations. Representations of the Holy Family. Participants in a vast teeming fellowship.]

Lunden’s encounter with the foreign architecture of Catholic Europe has given the ability to now perceive as new her past architectural encounters. The inner space of the Mediterranean holy building has

invigorated the poet's eye, producing a desire for a similar color and spirit in the interior of her domestic religious space. The traditional Nordic profile, "blond, høgreist" [blond, tall], is now greeted by a prepared observer who has "lytta til" [listened to] the Catholic decorations and who finds new meaning due to this experience of difference. As Edward S. Casey emphasizes, the modern consciousness of place is to a large extent bodily constituted. It is based on the notion of a body that joins experience and perception in the act of absorbing the place, an act that necessarily changes the subject's own internalized awareness of the process itself.<sup>44</sup>

The theme of the perception of place is even more pronounced when Lunden finds the sacred buildings in her own neighborhood. From her window, the poet can see two churches:

Frå stoveglaset har eg utsikt til to kyrkjer. Den eine er ei gammal steinkyrkje. Eit lite reir på åskanten. Spiret er ei fugle fjør. Eg ser den langt i det fjerne, kanskje heilt borte i nabosognet. Eg veit den ligg side om side med den andre kyrkja her i Bø (384)

[From my living room I can see two churches. One is an old stone church. A small nest on the hillside. The spire is a bird's feather. I see it far far away, maybe as far as the neighboring parish. I know it lies side by side with the other church here in Bø]

The window frames the objects under observation, producing a perceptual phenomenon in which sight automatically occurs within an aesthetic dimension. The function of a frame in both textual and visual art is to underscore the point that the object framed is an aesthetic selection from a larger landscape. Lunden's poem goes beyond this primary effect; the window's framing does not hold the poet's attention on the landscape perceived, but instead draws her awareness back into the subject toward something she already knows.

This development begins quite simply with the description of the two churches. One of them is metaphorically identified as "lite reir

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<sup>44</sup> Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, 331-32.



på åskanten” [small nest on the hillside]; later this “reir” [nest] becomes a place referred to by other poems in the work to which birds disappear (396) and where the moon rises over the hilltop (401). These latter references connect this poem with other texts in the volume, emphasizing the imagery’s internal connotative power as well as its stylization. The bird, the church, and the moon meet at the same place—at the top of the hill—and in this new, joint context reassemble the meanings of their respective origins. There are no religious overtones to this rhetoric. Rather, Lunden forms a solid visualization of the way in which manifest phenomena move along the border between perception and knowledge. This metaphoric and epistemological edge is the space in which memory and oblivion, dream and perception, and fantasy and experience compete for truth.

The poet continues to observe the old stone church, but now it is situated so that it seems removed “kanskje heilt borte i nabosognet” [maybe as far as the neighbouring parish]. The possibility of disappearance alerts the reader to the uncertain, and therefore unreliable, accuracy of the poet’s description. Finally, however, she *knows* that it lies side by side with the other church, as if they were an old couple in a double bed or two sarcophagi side by side in a crypt. There is, in other words, a movement taking place in the poem. The subject’s perception glides from a solid location (by the window) and, through a visible object in the distance shifts directly to something that is not an observation at all, but rather a knowledge based on experience.

My interpretation here aligns itself with the overall thematic structure of the collection. The essential concern of this poem lies in describing the churches as objects perceived, recorded, and remembered. In this respect, the churches demonstrate the fluid, slippery border between the seemingly fixed categories of experience and representation. As this imagery also resonates with other specific poems, it is carefully connected to the central aesthetic and epistemological problematic under consideration in the volume. The way in which Lunden carries out this artistic reflection on the perception of place provides a powerful poetic contribution to its philosophy.

## The Churchyard

Closely connected to churches as well as to tombs and other burial sites of antiquity is the churchyard. I will now turn to a poem that uses this specific place as its main motif. In this poem, I suggest that we can identify some essential ideas regarding place as it is perceived and poetically expressed by Lunden. Moreover, we can clearly read the poem as a textual intersection where old traditions involving the creation of a sacred place for the dead meet with the modern ideals of urban planning; the poem also provides a (post)modern reflection on this physical and spiritual encounter. The poet's visit to Le Père Lachaise Graveyard in Paris gives birth to the insight into how the past organizes its death as a massive construction of artistically worked stones. At the same time, she expresses amusement in playing with this overwhelming and alien impression.<sup>45</sup>

Installasjon

(etter eit besøk på æreskyrkjegarden du Père Lachaise i Paris)

Menneskeleg liv

i høg sokkelansamling på kyrkjegarden

sidan 1600-talet

Her går det i stein

Her står dei i stein

Døden organisert som forsteining. Men mosen

har ein sjanse. Den er så grøn. Den er så langsam

Den viser oss sin farge (375)

[Installation

(after a visit to Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris)

Human life

in a congregation of high plinths in the cemetery

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Unni Langås, "Gravstedet i nyere nordisk lyrikk" [The Grave in New Nordic Lyrics].

from the 17<sup>th</sup> century  
Everything stone  
Everyone stone

Death organized as petrification. Yet the moss  
has a chance. It is so green. It is so slow  
It shows us its color]

First, some history: Le Père Lachaise was established 1804 and contained all the features of a modern metropolitan cemetery. It was located outside the city in the continuation of an old garden that had been owned by the Jesuits since the fifteenth century. The architect Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart wanted the natural scenery and the existent graves to be included in the construction of a place with a city-like appearance. Exotic trees and plants, small paths, and green lawns competed with broad boulevards, elliptical spaces, and marvellous vantage points for the visitor's attention. Side by side the mausoleums and the monuments rose and the city of the dead quickly developed into a necropolis similar to the modern metropolis of Paris, copying its structure and design.

The churchyard became a museum, a place for the long-term preservation of human remnants, which could create the illusion of eternal presence. The fact that dead celebrities such as H  loise and Ab  lard, Moli  re, and La Fontaine were exhumed, brought to Le P  re Lachaise and reburied, contributed to this project. The churchyard exists as both a place and a non-place, states Anne-Louise Sommer, because it denotes something gone that cannot be re-represented. With reference to Michel Foucault, Sommer interprets the churchyard as a modern complex where life and death meld together and where "livets oph  r og kvasi-evigheden bliver to sider af samme sag" [the end of life and quasi-eternity become two sides of the same coin].<sup>46</sup> The museum-like aspects of the churchyard create a sense of historical accumulation, a sort of archive of the body's

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<sup>46</sup> Anne-Louise Sommer, "Kirkeg  rdens rum: Landskab og arkitektur som betydningsfelt" [The Space of the Churchyard: Landscape and Architecture as Sites of Significance] 104.

trace; the churchyard embodies the collection of all times into one place while simultaneously seeking to withdraw from temporal structures.

Michel Foucault describes the churchyard as a *heterotopia*, which in his definition is a place of border experiences. It is *another* place compared to ordinary cultural places, but it is intimately connected to the spaces of daily life. In his historic analysis, the nineteenth-century cemetery becomes a visual representative of a paradigmatic change defined by a declining belief in an eternal soul and a resurrected body, which then is counterbalanced by an increased attention toward earthly remains. Irrespective of how we analyze this change in burial habits, the fact remains: during the nineteenth century, Foucault laconically states, everybody was entitled to have their “own little box for her or his own little personal decay”.<sup>47</sup>

The title of Lunden’s poem—“Installation”—alludes to a kind of artwork that utilizes different sensual elements to invite the public into a complete, dynamic, and bodily aesthetic experience. In contrast to the modern installation, which speaks via objects from our daily life, in the churchyard the “furniture” is different: the stones indicate something other, something outside the ordinary. According to Lunden, human life is staged as stone sculptures on pedestals. The churchyard challenges our secular knowledge of death as nothingness and represents an intention to create a permanent, solid substitute for a decomposing body. The dead body and the stone sculpture exclude each other; it is possible to understand the height of the many plinths as an iconographic rejection of death combined with a vain striving to ascend and leave the ground behind. The higher the statues in both height and quantity, the lower the significance offered to the decaying bodies beneath. This phenomenon can be explained by the increasing secularization of the grave during the nineteenth century combined with a growing desire to demonstrate the prestige of the individual human being. The monumental statues and mausoleums were not erected primarily to demonstrate a collective belief, but rather to guarantee the dead individual a posthumous, particular reputation.

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<sup>47</sup> Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 97.

Again, like Lunden, I am tempted to quote D.H. Lawrence as he articulates similar thoughts regarding this phenomenon of massive stone aesthetics.

We have reached the stage where we are weary of huge stone erections, and we begin to realise that it is better to keep life fluid and changing, than to try to hold it fast down in heavy monuments. Burdens on the face of the earth are man's ponderous erections.<sup>48</sup>

This type of reflection is similar to the ideas developed in Lunden's poem. Between the figurative stones with their massive symbolic past and the contemporary observer, a breach occurs. This opening is not only temporal but also mental: a gap, which in Lunden's rhetoric, refers obliquely to the possibility for comedy. But the poem does not adopt an attitude of disrespect. Toward the end, the poet calmly reflects on the aesthetic form represented in the churchyard stones, namely, an artificial organization of a specific cultural and historic relationship to death. The difference between the museum-like staging of death in the churchyard and the modern poem, which also identifies itself as an "Installation," is thus made clear by Lunden. The poem casts a distant glance at the burial sites, but this glance is sympathetic and warm. It includes the graves in an attempt to perceive connections between the churchyard installation and the poetic installation.

Finally, nature—"mosen" [the moss]—is invited into the text in order to animate the place and underscore the actual presence of life. This gesture touches on another interesting aspect of the modern churchyard, namely its reconciliation between nature and culture. The habit of planting trees in churchyards dates back to the eighteenth century and was partly hygienic, partly aesthetic in its motivation. A British scientist pointed out that the leaves of the trees purified the air, thus the sanitary incentive. This period was also the era of the park and of pastoral poetry—the aesthetics of the formal neo-

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<sup>48</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Sketches of Etruscan Places* 32.

classical garden informed not only landscape architecture, but prose, poetry, and the visual arts. In the new churchyards, nature was integrated within a cultural space that paralleled the Romantic garden, usually overburdened with symbolism: stones and sculptures signified both frozen time and a calm distance. The green plants, which would return year after year, hinted at a death overcome, transformed into an organic rebirth—an eternal life.

Lunden's churchyard poem concludes by touching upon this exact tension between stone and moss, culture and nature, death and life. While I do not advocate a reading of the poem as an analogue to a Romantic notion of cyclic revival or to a Christian conception of eternity, the poem does resonate with these ideas while reflecting on the powerful perception of the substantiality of absence.

## Poetry of Place

Lunden situates her poems about place in the intersection between description, memory, and reflection. Her childhood landscapes are made present either through renewed visits or experiences remembered. The main purpose in either case is to underline the diverse qualities of the coastal landscape. These qualities are not neutral, but internalized as crucial components of human identity, understood both individually and collectively as cultural processes. The landscape is a source of images, concepts, and complex systems of meaning; it represents a vital semantic resource for Lunden's endeavor to relate new experiences to ones past. There is a sensitivity toward climatic conditions that is deeply inscribed throughout Lunden's ten volumes of poetry, as well as a recurring tendency to express via rhetorical subtleties the body's relation to nature.

In the encounters with cultural places, which are primarily connected to existential aspects of human life, Lunden distinguishes herself as a poet who prefers philosophical and intellectual issues. There are very few places taken from daily life, such as the office, the kitchen, the garden, the drugstore, the barn, etc. in her texts. This fact confirms the impression that Lunden consciously uses place in her work as a deliberate motif in order to further her philosophical inquiries rather than simply to describe daily life. As evidenced by

the places important to Lunden's central interests discussed in this chapter, Lunden uses physical locations to evoke fundamental, ontological situations that explore the fluctuating experiential borders that constitute our lives. People struggle with high ambitions and expectations, they become imprisoned by their own desires or societal structures of subjugation, and they are struck with sudden death. The places that interest Lunden seem to be primarily tied to questions concerning the way our culture deals with political and existential challenges, as well as how different cultures prepare for and interpret a possible afterlife.

Lunden also underscores the dynamics present in the experience of artificial expressions of life and death when the observed objects and past sites are judged by a modern intelligence. She deliberately foregrounds the different lenses through which she balances her own observations; this technique crafts her texts on foreign and past cultures into a dialogue that concerns not only the past and the present, but also the dynamic exchange of ideas in an endless semiosis. Through deeply serious, but also humorous, poems, Lunden investigates recollections from the near and distant past as lasting and meaningful places, furnished with concentrated significance and intellectual challenges to the modern mind.





### 3. Pictures: Ekphrasis and other Representations of Images

The cover of Eldrid Lunden's debut volume, *f.eks. juli* (1968), where-in text and image appear as an iconographic expression, is a significant sign of her fascination with the relationship between these two modes of representation. The text-image thematic in her work spans from poems that clearly seek to represent visual art through language—ekphrases—by means of free meditations inspired by visual art, to poems that create a profound uncertainty about the ontological status of the described object. Such poems force the question: is this a mimetic account of the phenomenal world, a projection of mental imagery, or is it an allusion to, description of, or comment on another representation? Inevitably, as a recurring subject in Lunden's poetry, the problem of representation merges with other modes of understanding such as memory, perception, and thought.

Among others, the Danish scholar Annette Fryd has pointed out that many modern poets are engaged in text-image relationships. Fryd comes to the conclusion that this concern in modern art refers to a crisis of representation in general. In ekphrasis this problem is not only thematized, but performed, according to Fryd. The traditional task assigned to visual art has been to represent reality in faithful, visually recognizable ways, but Impressionism and Modernism opened a significant and far-reaching breach in tradition. When modern ekphrasis depicts a non-mimetic piece of art, such as an artwork without other reference other than itself, it focuses on its own problems of representation. "Hvordan repræsentere noget, som selv modsætter sig representation?" [How is it possible to represent something that objects representation?] Fryd asks.<sup>49</sup>

In Lunden's poetry, fascination with images does not limit itself to modernist art, but instead stretches from pre-historic rock carvings to grave-site decorations from antiquity, from Renaissance

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<sup>49</sup> Annette Fryd, *Billedtale: Om mødet mellem billedkunst og litteratur hos Gunnar Ekelöf, Ole Sarvig og Per Højholt* 13 [Picture Speech: On the Encounter between Visual Arts and Literature in Gunnar Ekelöf, Ole Sarvig and Per Højholt].

paintings and sculptures to Naturalist and Impressionist painting, and from the advent of photography to postmodern video art. A constant within these various historical aesthetic expressions is found in Lunden's ekphrastic poems as they invite us to become aware of the blurred borders between descriptions of visual expressions and mental images devoid of explicit external referents. Here, in this seemingly empty interval, she finds a poetic site: a space where the epistemology of poetry brings forth something new, something distinct from both visual media and other verbal genres. This aesthetic creation occurs in many of Lunden's poems where the reader becomes uncertain as to whether the poem describes an actual picture or a visual representation, or whether the description is instead that of the outer manifestation of an inner reality.

## Ekphrasis—The Genre

The goal of an ekphrasis, according to Murray Krieger, is to provide artistic language with the task of representing something that is, in fact, impossible to represent. In his definition, the object of ekphrasis is a plastic piece of art, a picture or a sculpture. Krieger sees the essence of ekphrasis as a double function, wherein verbal language freezes around a form that simultaneously loosens its formal rigidity—thus the verbal shell reflects the reality of the instant, but fails to capture the shifting essence inherent to the structural identity of the formal object. This ambiguity is due to the ambivalent impulses found in the reader, who wants language to remain in a rigid spatial pattern and at the same time accepts the fact that language remains incapable of such permanence.<sup>50</sup>

James A.W. Heffernan maintains that a constant element in ekphrasis from antiquity to the present has been the narrative impulse that the stasis of the picture sets in motion.<sup>51</sup> According to Heffernan, an ekphrastic text animates the image by means of a narrative, even if such a text begins as unadorned description. Heffernan considers ekphrasis in essence to be a *paragone*—a rivalry between word and

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<sup>50</sup> See Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* 9.

<sup>51</sup> James A.W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* 1.

image—and he underscores that the dilemma of the text consists in revealing the power of an image while simultaneously keeping this power under control.

Ekphrasis is a historically constant form, but the antique and classical versions differ from the modern one. Heffernan references Michael Davidson, who maintains that classical ekphrasis describes a plastic artwork with the intention of imitating its autonomous quality. The poet “reads” the work of art textually and interprets its aesthetics within a framework of mimetic transparency in a careful effort to express both verbally and visually the form and content of the artwork. This consciously mimetic approach reflects a sense of responsibility to which modern ekphrasis no longer subscribes. In its modern incarnation, ekphrasis treats the object without such an obligation.

In his work on ekphrasis, Heffernan expands on this observation by cataloging several universal aspects of the genre: the transformation of the static image to a dynamic narrative, the direct address of the mute motif (*prosopopeia*), the tensions between the signifying text and the signified visual object, and a persistent struggle between word and image (*paragone*). What characterizes modern ekphrasis, in his eyes, is primarily the dissolution of the intimate connection between the text and the described object whereby the ontological status of ekphrasis has been changed from a contingent supplement into an autonomous literary work. Modern ekphrasis develops within the space of the museum, which serves as its institutional context. The modern techniques of reproduction, as well as the entire industry of curators and art historians who see to it that art is presented and contextualized—both spatially and linguistically—in specific ways, heavily influence the relationship between poetry and art.<sup>52</sup>

The “impossibility” of ekphrasis has inspired several theorists. Ekphrasis is impossible because someone who reads an ekphrastic text does not see or experience the same work of art as the original audience. W. J. T. Mitchell has elaborated on this aspect of the relationship between ekphrasis and “the other.” In the gap opened between text and

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<sup>52</sup> James A.W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, 138–39.

image, Mitchell finds a returning ambivalence that generates three modes of dealing with ekphrasis: ignorance, hope, and fear. Ignorance emerges with the recognition of the fact that a text can never completely replace an image as a sufficient substitute, but in ignorance of that inevitable failure the text continues to try to describe it. Hope results from the fact that this attempt may still provide an adequate impression and even to the point of eliminating the differences between the two media. Fear occurs when these harmonizing efforts turn out to be a threat to the pre-existent condition in which the world is experienced through two dimensions, the visual and the verbal.

Ekphrasis, then, is a poetic genre that underscores the difference between a text and its semiotic “other.” However, even if Mitchell intends to minimize the differences he in effect maintains that the ambivalence that he observes is connected to the ambivalence in our encounters with other people. “Ekphrastic hope and fear express our anxieties about merging with other others,” according to Mitchell. Such hope and fear suggest that the most important purpose of the poetry of ekphrasis lies in its ability to provide a space in which we may face this situation.<sup>53</sup>

## Pictorial Allusions

Charles Baudelaire’s famous essay “Le peintre de la vie moderne” (1863) presents the author as a painter of modern life; modernist poets have persistently and productively received impulses from the visual arts. From the beginning, a similar attitude can be observed in Lunden’s work. But as we will see, her poems are not primarily occupied with describing the modern world or any visual object as such. Instead, they are profoundly tied to a deeply rooted interest in perception and its function as a premise for knowledge. The described objects, events, or emotions are certainly important concerns in and of themselves, but the way in which they are expressed—through a verbal representation of sensation—draws our attention to modes of perception and articulation.

To begin, let us look at several poems from *Inneringa*.

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<sup>53</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, “Ekphrasis and the Other” 163.

Plutseleg ein dag skliir han  
i eit andlet  
der kjenslene har runne utover. (47)

[Suddenly one day he slips  
in a face  
where feelings have spilled over.]

The poem likely comments on an emotional crisis caused by a conflict between two lovers. (As always in Lunden, the context is sparse and the gaps many, so declarative contextualization remains risky.) Here is a man who “slips / in a face.” Whether the face belongs to her or to him is not clear, but the image requires a slippery surface, such as tearful skin, and it unbalances the man. At the same time, the poem provides a possible association with a painting where the colors are not quite dry and the features of a face are blurred in a modernist way. This visual approach to reading the words receives support from the following poems where the use of a variety of colors provides an underlying foundation for this section of the text, which explores both mourning over a broken relationship as well as artistic techniques of representation.

This vibrancy begins immediately following the “slippery” poem with the color gray, which is utilized in the two subsequent poems to provide the woman’s mood with a specific tint. In the first poem, the woman thinks of a gray floor: she herself has a “stille lys / i hovudet” (47) [quiet light / in the head]. In the second poem, a human being is described as gray—in contrast to the gray of nature—and “pustar med grå munn” (47) [breathing with a gray mouth], as if the air is cold. Both poems are visually concrete in their description of a mental or iconic image (it is impossible to finally determine which) and at the same time their textual location, following a poem where emotions are poured over, implies that gray signifies the emotional excesses of sadness and mourning.

Another color poem slides slowly from a description of a landscape to description of a picture, nearly an ekphrasis, whereby the colors gradually transform into autonomous elements:

Dei ser det grøne  
dekke våt  
mold om hausten,

dei er tørste

haustane, grøne hestar  
med vridde halsar i jorda,  
markene står sterkt, stutt,

dette ser fargane på,  
stilt. (48)

[They see the green  
covering wet  
mould in fall,

they are thirsty

the falls, green horses  
with twisted necks in the ground,  
the fields prevail, briefly,

all this the colors watch,  
in silence.]

The indistinct referential system is a main feature of this poem, underscoring the pictorial theme. “Dei” [They], as an anonymous plural pronoun, can refer to all the nouns following in the text: “haustane” [autumns], “hestar” [horses], and “fargane” [colors]. The repetition of the pronoun may also indicate that “dei” [they] first refers to the “fargane” [colors] and secondly to “haustane” [the falls] or “hestar” [horses]. In addition, the reference to “grøne” [green] seems somewhat unclear as green initially covers wet mold in the autumn and then afterwards shifts to the horses. This ambiguous assignation may, then, indicate a common (pictorial) reference,

namely green horses that bow toward the wet mold in the autumn, an image that presents itself as a possible motif in a painting.

The poem produces through its referential practice an equivocal meaning that should not be erased, but rather emphasized: a multiplicity of signification represents the surplus value of poetry in comparison with that of visual media. Due to its breach with conventions—both visual and literary in the green horses and vague syntactical references—the poem inspires an interpretative dynamic that the picture itself (if there is a picture!) remains incapable of sustaining.

The following poem reinforces this point more clearly:

Dei mørkeblå dyra i årane  
som spring på sine helleristningsbein  
gjennom raudt gras, og spyd som  
dryp gjennom biletet og ikkje  
når. (48)

[The dark blue animals in the veins  
running on their rock carved legs  
through red grass, and spears that  
seep through the image and never  
strike]

This text provides a clear example of ekphrasis in its description of a rock carving where the contours of animals are inscribed with blue strokes upon the stone. The description here emphasizes the dynamic nature of animals in motion as well as the dramatic situation. The animals run through red grass, hunted by spears. These spears “dryp gjennom biletet” [seep through the image], a formulation that evokes varying interpretations, and are most likely marked as a series of strokes over the entire carving. The dripping refers to the color red as well as to the forthcoming blood that will run when an animal is struck.

The dynamic flow of the hunting scene is broken, however, in the final lines of the poem by the words “ikkje / når” [never / strike]. The

caesura between these words poetically creates and thereby underscores a breach, directing our attention to the actual stasis of the image. This impasse reverses the action of the related narrative, and instead acknowledges that the carving does not possess the motion that the viewer and poem project into it. In other words, it is the gaze of the reader that interprets the red strokes as dripping blood: the picture itself simply provides a physical representation of the distance between the spear and the animal.

From an aesthetic perspective, this literary reminder of an open space relates to the problem of representation initiated by the difference between text and image. The text is, by virtue of its temporality—words must be read one after each other in time—and its rhetorical capacities, able to animate the image as an interpretive account from the viewpoint of the reader. Whereas the carving is frozen and mute, placed on the rock thousands of years ago, the poem reinvigorates the drama and reminds us of its capacity to do so.

This ekphrasis is distinct from those previously discussed, but it contains the colors and pictorial elements in common with the other poems in the volume. There is also a thematic connection to the theme of wounded emotions, and thus the hunted animals, the spears in the air, and the dripping red each enrich the aesthetic dimension of the motif. Perhaps we may even read the final caesura—“ikkje / når” [never / strike]—as an oblique reference to absence itself, a sorrow that art confirms but cannot cure, or a mourning found in poetic expression but not identical with such. The categorical breach—between two lines, between animal and spear, and, ultimately, between text and image—at the end of the poem opens a fruitful interpretive space in its literary and thematic gap.

Pictorial allusions frequently appear throughout Lunden’s poetry, but for our purposes here I will confine myself to commentary on two additional poems from Lunden’s subsequent volume, *hard, mjuk*. Both poems exemplify a typical ekphrastic procedure in which a seemingly straightforward landscape sketch results in a complete picture description.



Kvar kveld går ho fram  
til ein mørk brunn i vinteren  
der isen aldri ligg, biletet  
er i svart kvitt. (69)

[Every evening she goes up  
to a dark well in winter  
where ice never forms, the picture  
is black and white.]

The phrase “ein mørk brunn i vinteren” [a dark well in winter] provides a stylized image that hints to the human and interior (mental) dimension of the landscape motif. It is tempting to link this description to both an outer event and an inner mental projection. For example, the black-and-white image refers to photography even as it also implicitly evokes the contrasts of a winter landscape in a dark setting.

The following poem explores how this pictorial problematic can be tied to a reflection. The mirror-like process by which we understand past and present, internalizing past experiences and anticipating future events, is based on our self-perception. The subsequent interpretation provides a thematic link between the interior space of the personal and the exterior projection of the aesthetic product.

Når eg nå tenker tilbake  
ligg vinteren stille i  
synsfeltet, mørkret er nesten  
ute av bildet, noen  
kjem (69)

[When I now think back  
the winter remains quiet in  
my field of vision, the dark is almost  
out of the picture, some one  
is coming]

The thought is an image, almost entirely static, but then set in motion at the end where “noen / kjem” [some one / is coming]. It is the privilege of the poem itself to blur the information of where this motion takes place: in reality, in memory, or in a picture. Each of these poems illustrates how the theme of understanding is concretized in Lunden as a relationship between text and image. They present intellectual work as a type of inner mental meditation on past events that simultaneously provides a verbal description of—or allusion to—pictures, images, and representations of ocular perception.

## Art and Gender

Questions of representation are not always the most important aspect regarding Lunden's engagement with pictures. Another type of pictorial reflection can be found in *Noen må ha vore her før*, a work concerned with the problems of gender, aesthetics, and politics. The book contains references to Christian Krohg's naturalistic painting *Albertine i politilegens venteværelse* [Albertine in the Police Physician's Waiting Room] (1885–87) as well as other Albertine motifs, including his controversial novel *Albertine* (1886). These works were originally intended and read as contributions to the debate on sexuality, morality, and prostitution in the 1880s. The novel was confiscated upon its release to the public on December 20, 1886; the author was given a fine of 200 crowns and ordered to pay additional costs amounting to 100 crowns. The political effect of the novel was an increase in attention to the practice of prostitution, which had been indirectly legalized by Norwegian authorities through the control of the compulsory health care system. This control was transferred in 1887 from the police physician to the public health authority, partly due to the influence of Krohg.

Krohg's apparent intent was to describe how male sexual practice leads to moral and physical decay. In order to achieve this political aim, Krohg uses a conventionally gendered narrative of seduction where the woman is the object of desire to men.<sup>54</sup> A telling example

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<sup>54</sup> For further exploration of this idea, see my article “City Seductions: Consumer Culture and New Designs of Desire in the 1880s” in Eriksen and Sivefors, eds. *Urban Preoccupations: Mental and Material Landscapes* 217–228.

of how Krohg describes Albertine with a painter's sense of visual impression occurs in the text when the policeman Winther is about to rape Albertine. In Winther's gaze, and in Krohg's picturesque description, Albertine changes into a desirable but highly enigmatic body containing a mysterious shadow that represents her ostensibly hidden sexuality.

Efter som Kindets blege, ovale Linje gled forsvindende nedover mod Halsen, tabte det varme gule Lys sig uden nogen Grænse i Skyggen nedenfor Øret og kom saa for sidste Gang igjen paa Halsens strakte Muskel. Saa seiret Skyggen og blandede sig i umærkelige Overgange med den bundløse, mørke Afgrund i Fløilen.<sup>55</sup>

[As the cheek's pale, oval outline gradually disappeared down towards her throat, the warm, yellow light blended into the shadow below her ear and appeared again for the last time on the taut muscle of her throat. Then the shadow triumphed and blended imperceptibly with the bottomless, dark chasm of the velvet.]

Winther gazes greedily at Albertine's beautiful body, his touch light on her fringe as he parts it is the first symbolic sign of the imminent penetration, which in Krohg's writing has the unmistakable outline of a rape. Winther shifts from friendly seducer to violent animal with alarming alacrity, and Albertine, to her surprise, finds herself in bed with his disgusting body atop her own. This act of violence is in Krohg's fiction the pivotal event leading to Albertine's prostitution and destruction.

Lunden is obviously disturbed by Krohg's work where a female character is so brutally sacrificed to man—and to art. Lunden also questions the behavior of other women in this environment, namely the painter (and Krohg's wife) Oda Krohg and the pianist and writer Dagny Juell. These women both struggled with the dichotomy

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<sup>55</sup> Christian Krohg, *Albertine* 156.

between their expectations as artists and the contemporary societal norms regarding gender roles. Lunden, however, is also conscious of class and its potential to further complicate the relationships at stake. Lunden separates Oda Krohg and Dagny Juell from Albertine by having them represent the upper class in contrast to Albertine's decidedly lower-class status. This female triangle adds additional social complexity to the politics at work in the poems.

Woman as victim, as a silent observer, as a disillusioned artist, and as an object of art herself, serves as an important motif in these poems. Why do they act as they do, Lunden asks. What remains from the remembrance of their lives, whether such lives be artistically created or real, and what is its importance? It is symptomatic that Lunden stages the fictive Albertine as ontologically more real, and more sympathetic, than Dagny and Oda, who are blamed because of their silence:

Oda sa ingenting  
Dagny sa ingenting  
Albertine blei pressa ut i prostitusjon  
av politiet  
Christian sa noe  
Oda sa fortsatt ingenting  
Dagny sa fortsatt ingenting (248)

[Oda said nothing  
Dagny said nothing  
Albertine was forced into prostitution  
by the police  
Christian said something  
Oda still said nothing  
Dagny still said nothing]

The verbal repetitions provide critical commentary on the attitude of the two women, but they also highlight the enigma in their relationship to each other and to the subject matter. Why didn't they care? Lunden directs the question in our own time. Perhaps she is right in

blaming the feminist movement for being primarily committed to middle class women and less interested in violence related to sexuality and gender.

Lunded uses the name “Albertine” itself as a ritualistic mantra as her poems explore physical and mental wounds, assaults and abuse, and the convenient temptation among women, who see themselves as not wounded, to ignore the wounds in others. But in opening up this space for consideration, Lunden also encounters a noticeable sense of guilt.

Albertine sit i Odas hår  
når Oda lettar. Albertine er ein skarpere  
lut for Odas lut. Albertine er store mørke-  
tall bak menns jarnteppe, og det evige rusket  
i kvinnerørslas auge (259)

[Albertine sits in Oda’s hair  
when Oda takes off. Albertine is a sharper  
lye for Oda’s lye. Albertine, the hidden  
statistics behind men’s iron curtain, and the eternal mote  
in the eye of women’s lib]

In this text, Albertine herself turns into a series of metaphors that spreads her name out into the different dimensions of gender-related conflicts. When Albertine “sit i Odas hår” [sits in Oda’s hair] she becomes a part of Oda; perhaps, Lunden slyly suggests, Oda also exhibits traits of Albertine? The hair that binds the two women together conventionally connotes beauty and sex appeal. But, in a reversal of that appeal, Albertine is then depicted as “lut” [lye], a powerful household cleanser with a domestic as well as a darker connotation. We can read this as the representation of a “dirty” sexuality; perhaps the prostitute is expected to inform other women about the violence of her sexuality. Albertine is “store mørke- / tall bak menns jarnteppe” [the hidden / statistics behind men’s iron curtain]. As such, she is both a physical darkness and an unknown number—the iron curtain that hides her from view is made by men and thus

remains invisible in the public record. Finally, she is also “det evige rusket / i kvinnerørslas auge” [the eternal mote / in the eye of women’s lib], a description that emphasizes the unsolved and complex problem the women’s movement sees in prostitution.

Another poem creates an image of Albertine that emphasizes her normality over her prostitution and therefore contextualizes her as a victim of invisible mechanisms of violence.

Albertine er i all krypande kjensle  
for stengt kvinneliv i form av ein  
blomsterbukett. Albertine let seg villig  
fange heilt til den dagen ho går omkring  
i sitt eige blomsterblod (257)

[Albertine is there in any crawling recognition  
of a woman’s enclosed life expressed through  
a bunch of flowers. Albertine lets herself willingly  
be caught right until the day she treads  
in her own flowerblood]

This poem paints a gloomy image of a life governed by gender norms. The metaphor “krypande kjensle” [crawling recognition] contains repulsive and creepy connotations, implying that Albertine in this case represents a woman’s life in tense conflict with diffuse energies. Seemingly happy, she receives flowers from a male admirer, but in so doing she becomes painfully trapped in her own “blomsterblod” [flowerblood]. The poet plays with the novel’s own game of seduction, introduced when Albertine catches the gaze of two unpleasant gentlemen on the street. The end of Krohg’s novel displays an Albertine stripped of both shame and honor which causes the male predators to turn away in disgust. Instead of following Krohg’s thematic development, Lunden establishes a connection between the rules of seduction and the seemingly innocuous gestures of flirtation. In doing so, Lunden creates an attitude toward women that allows for an ethic inflected by power and violence.

Lunden’s literary engagement with a specific painting takes up

the historical and political context of both the painting itself as well as additional aesthetic responses to the work. Beyond the traditional contours of pure ekphrasis, this ekphrastic aesthetic orientation enriches the original artwork while simultaneously enmeshing Lunden's poems within political, economic, and ethical dimensions of an ongoing (and continually problematic) discussion regarding gender and its relation to art.

## Pictorial Meditations

*Til stades. Tekstar om erindring og gløymse* contains a veritable palette of ekphrastic poems. Some are pure ekphrases, while others are meditations on an object of visual art. Lunden tends to refrain from making a detailed description in her poems and instead seeks inspiration in the picture itself for a different sort of reflection.

Sometimes these poems deal with historical material, addressing a past culture and often drawing connections to our contemporary situation. A characteristic concern of ekphrasis, and of Lunden's picture poems, is the animation of the picture so that the object is presented as if it were alive. An interesting effect occurs when the description initially appears to refer to an actual, living, human being but then ultimately depicts a piece of art. Sometimes a sculpture, like Michelangelo's "David," or a plaster cast of a human being like those from Pompeii, can be revitalized by the poet's pen and acquire their own narratives. Renaissance paintings may be narrativized into dialogues between the characters depicted or into questions put forth by the curious viewer. In each case, Lunden adds a historical dimension to the visual objects so that the interaesthetic dialogue between the older paintings or sculptures and the modern viewer provides existential questions, familiar and strange.

Museo Academico i Firenze  
(05.11.1998)

På avstand er det det smekre og sårbare

over magen og hoftene vi ser. I det

vi langsamt går nærmare  
kjem blikket  
og dreg blikket vårt til seg

Han tek ikkje sats. Ikkje endå  
Nasevengene  
er  
berre nasevenger

Om aldri skulle noen ha sett eit fredelegare kjønn

Han held slynga over skuldra og steinen skjult i høg  
hand, musklane  
lyttar

blodåra i halsen  
er det einaste vi ser  
røre seg

i Michelangelos "David" (351)

[Museo Academico in Florence  
(05.11.1998)]

First it is the slenderness and vulnerability

about the stomach and hips that we see. As  
we slowly move closer  
it is the eye  
that draws our eye towards itself

Not ready to throw. Not yet  
The wings of his nose  
are  
mere wings of a nose



And never have we seen a calmer sex

He holds the sling over his shoulder and the stone hidden in his right  
hand, his muscles  
attentive

the vein in his throat  
is the only thing we see  
moving

in Michelangelo's "David"]

The poem's object is Michelangelo's famous sculpture "David" (1504), a fact the poem conceals until the final verse. The identification of the museum in the title provides an indication—for the well-informed reader—as to the possible topic. But apart from this reference, it's possible for the reader to believe that the poem describes a living person.

As in many of the ekphrastic poems, the poet's gaze is incorporated as a theme into the text. Point of view, selection, and evaluation are as important to the poem's composition as is the object itself. The gaze quickly focuses on the man, approaches him carefully, views his body, interprets his expression and position in mid act, and appreciates his beauty. Even though contextually we know the figure is caught in the moment prior to an act of violence, weapon in hand, he appears quiet and peaceful. When at the end of the poem the gaze focuses on the moving carotid, it evokes the paradoxical moment in which a non-living object—here a sculpture—appears to be alive precisely due to the absence of motion. This development in the poem emphasizes what both artists and scholars of ekphrasis have pointed out: namely that while complete verbal representation is impossible, language operates in a manner that allows us to see and experience the artwork better than we did before.

Several of Lunden's poems comment on well-known paintings that do not require an introduction in order for the reader to realize the motif under consideration. Other poems combine a dispassionate

description with personal thought and interpretation. In this way, the poem opens up a complex network of various tensions—between the text and the painting (which, in turn, may itself refer to other paintings), between the lifeless artwork and the animating gaze, and between the absent object and the present verbal representation. An example of this elasticity in this genre is found in “Leonardo da Vinci: Engelen kjem med bod til Maria” [The Annunciation to Mary]:

Engelen: Høyr på meg! Dette er det største alvor!

Maria: Eg høyrer... men det du seier forvirrar meg... (354)

[The Angel: Listen! This is serious!

Mary: I am listening... but what you say confuses me.]

The poem is neither a description nor an interpretation, but rather a staging of the painted figures as actors and participants in a historical religious drama. It strips the narrative down to pure dialogue consisting of only two lines that underscore the monastic occasion and the possible experience of each character. Another dimension at work in the poem is that of gender: the angel (traditionally male) speaks in an authoritarian language while Mary listens with a reluctant, receptive, but also confused attitude. Even the punctuation illustrates the mechanisms of male metaphysical power: the angel speaks with declarative force underscored by the exclamation marks, while Mary's hesitancy is evidenced by multiple ellipses.

However, it is possible to view the angel as a more androgynous character. In some poems the angel takes the part of a semantic relationship between birds and women. There are other such relationships between birds and women throughout Lunden's book, ranging from the sister of Martinus Rørvik, who was “ei stor, lys jente med venger i den kvite kjolen” [a big, fair girl with wings in her white dress] (336), to Botticelli's “Venus' fødsel” [The Birth of Venus] where women in veils hang suspended in the air (353). Mary also

occasionally is depicted as strong and secure, as in the poem about Masaccio's painting of the holy family. Here she stands below the crucified Christ and "ser / på tilskuaren med eit bydande uttrykk i ansiktet" [looks / at the beholder with a pleading expression on her face] (355). In "Botticelli: Madonna del Roseto" the Infant Jesus hovers over Mary's lap and asks a seemingly simple question:

Jesusbarnet sjevande på Marias fang. Jesusbarnet tek  
tak i kjolen hennar og ser spørjande opp:  
Mor, kvifor er eg komen her? (353)

[Baby Jesus hovering over Mary's lap. Baby Jesus catches  
hold of her dress and looks up with the question:  
Mother, why have I come here?]

The Child's question addresses the religious background of these paintings, but Lunden appears to reconsider the metaphysical dimensions of the motif by calling attention to its ordinary, human significance. In Biblical narratives, such as those interpreted by the Renaissance artists, the poet sees living persons depicted in stylized but recognizable situations; at the same time, she also observes the temperament of the artist himself embedded within the expressive content of the painting itself. "Vi ser følsomme helgenar hos Giotto (1266–1337) // Vi ser tørste og vellystige Jesusbarn hos Masolino (1383–1447) og / Maria med sitronbryst og gjennomsiktig kjole heilt ned til lysken" (348) [We see the sensitive saints of Giotto (1266–1337) // We see Masolino's thirsty and lusty Infants (1383–1447) and / Mary with lemon breasts and dress transparent down to her groin].

Young girls repeatedly catch the attention of Renaissance painters. Lunden, not surprisingly, pays special attention to these girls: how do they look, move, and how are they positioned within the pictorial frame? Botticelli especially enjoys painting young girls in a wide variety of settings. Lunden plucks them from their relative anonymity in order to reveal the modern gaze upon the painted Renaissance girl.

Ungjente med septer mellom fingrane  
fingrar som fingrar så  
grasiøst som berre ulevd liv kan fingre  
og kjensle av ungjentemakt som liksom ikkje  
veit noen annen utveg enn å hovne  
litt opp i kinna (349)

[A young girl with a sceptre between her fingers  
fingers fingering as  
gracefully as only unlived life can finger  
and the feeling of a young girl's power that sort of  
knows no other way out than to gently  
puff out her cheeks]

The fascination here focuses on the fingers as painted by the artist: both lifelike and graceful. They look so real that the observer must remind herself of the fact that she is standing in front of a life unlived. The young girl thoroughly captivates the viewer, even though she is, in reality, composed of pigment placed upon canvas in a visual representation of a life. The irony—or humor—in Lunden's verbal account is nevertheless present when she modifies this power to enthrall into two puffed up cheeks.

Another poem regarding “La Fortezza” presents her in three distinct, even radical, versions. Lunden places wildly rebellious thoughts and words in the young woman's mouth; it is as if the modern feminist cannot bear to see the female body forever frozen both by the painting itself and its referent virtue, fortitude. At the very least, Lunden presents a sympathetic version of the female body that incarnates a tamed revolt.

Botticelli: La fortessa  
(tre versjonar)

La fortessa med jentefingrar, spåkule og sverd  
La fortessa med jentefingrar, slange og spegel  
La fortessa med jentefingrar, septer og ansiktsuttrykk: Livet er ferdig  
desillusjonert. Men det blir ikkje eg som døyr. Fuck you! Fuck me! (352)

[Botticelli: La fortezza  
(Three versions)]

La fortezza with a girl's fingers, crystal ball and sword  
La fortezza with a girl's fingers, serpent and looking glass  
La fortezza with a girl's fingers, scepter and the expression: Life is over  
disillusioned. But I won't be the one to die. Fuck you! Fuck me!]

These three versions align themselves with Botticelli's own proposal, but they provide an additional option through which the expectations of the modern observer are transgressed. This transgression allows the painted figure to speak and think as herself rather than as a part of the structure into which she has been inscribed. The woman exists as the stable element around which the painter performs; in Lunden's version, she is intensely occupied with a critique of the designated posture that she must embody. While there is an obvious risk in this anachronistic interpretation on Lunden's part, ultimately such risk fails to negate the importance of Lunden's aesthetic project. Instead, this anachronism provides the necessary distance between Botticelli's girl and the contemporary liberated young woman that allows the feminist gaze to dissect the situation.

However—and this is the very point at which the poem and the painting become highly relevant—at the same time there is something disturbingly universal in the position of Botticelli's woman. She is observed, and as such she performs: she does what she can in order to look attractive, beautiful, and seductive according to the conventions of the day, but not without divulging a striking distress. These are the same mechanisms at play in the contemporary woman's pose for the camera in magazines, on television, and on the internet. Lunden points to a tension between the desire to be seen, recognized, attractive, and admired and, on the other hand, to maintain a nucleus of integrity, freedom, and self-determination. In this respect, the modern viewpoint seems to discover a weakness in the female gender, a weakness that is perhaps better seen as the continuation of a structural phenomenon across epochs and trends, which

accordingly requests a rebellious attitude in order to break—or at least be conscious of—ideological pressure.

## Ekphrastic Fear

In *Flokken og skuggen*, Lunden continues to investigate the relationship between word and image through both ekphrasis as well as more mixed literary forms. The poet makes new discoveries and creates new images along the borders between perception, reflection, and representation. Several of these poems contain quite disturbing aspects, as if the images themselves are capable of experiencing pain; such pain is thematically developed as, for instance, cruelty toward animals in a cellar or as the sight of black crows circling a field.

Birds are also presented visually on the cover illustration, which is M.C. Escher's "Day and Night" (1938). This carefully constructed picture exhibits a symmetry inspired by Moorish mosaics and depicts black and white patches that gradually morph into birds. The birds fly in opposing directions over the landscape containing a little town, a river, and a number of patches. The picture comments on its own aesthetic puzzle, which challenges perceived differences between landscape and sign, and forces the observer to reflect on the act of perception itself (what do we see first, birds or patches?) and the underlying context surrounding the drawing of a landscape (does it originate from a referent in nature or from a fixed pattern?).

These questions reverberate throughout the book in different ways, as in the following poem about the polar bear.

Bildet av den kvite bjørnen kjem tilbake

Det er nesten berre kvitt. Ei uendeleg kvit  
fjellside og den kvite binna  
med ungar tumlande mellom beina

Ho snur hovudet mot vinden  
Eg tenker på den svarte, fuktige snuten hennar

men ser berre hovudet som søker  
fram og tilbake

Ho veit ho kan lukte ein hanne lenge før  
han luktar henne. Og at dette er den einaste  
sjansen ho har. Hannen trur ungane er rivalar  
i paringstida

I det binna drar seg sidelengs oppover vidda og  
forsvinn over kanten, glir boka igjen  
(53)<sup>56</sup>

[The image of the white bear is back

It's almost entirely white. An infinite white  
mountainside and the white bear  
with her cubs tumbling between her legs

She turns her head towards the wind  
I'm thinking of her black moist muzzle  
but can only see her head seeking  
backwards and forwards

She knows she can smell a male long before  
he smells her. And that this is her one  
advantage. The male believes the cubs are rivals  
in the mating season

As she moves sideways up the mountain and  
disappears over the edge, the book gently closes]

The beginning and end of the poem tell us that the bear under consideration might be found in a picture in a book, but the middle section gives the impression that the bear is observed directly. This tex-

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<sup>56</sup> I refer to *Flokken og skuggen*, 2005.

tual frame identifies the poem as an ekphrasis and, in accordance with ekphrastic conventions, the poetic narrative animates the subject, causing tension between word and image to surface. The narrative voice describes not only the external portions of the image, but also includes the thoughts of the female bear (“Ho veit ho kan lukte ein hanne” [She knows she can smell a male]) and the male bear’s impression (“Hannen trur” [The male believes]). Additionally, the lyrical subject reveals her own thoughts as they arise in front of the picture (“Eg tenker på den svarte, fuktige snuten hennar” [I’m thinking of her black moist muzzle]). In reality, the picture does not show the bear’s snout. Instead, it shows the bear turning its head. This discrepancy highlights the fact that while a static picture does not exhibit motion, a text, though physically similar to a picture in its dimensionality and the permanence of type upon the page, contains the ability to *move*. Ekphrastic techniques here make it possible for the picture and its content to come to life.

“Now you see me, now you see me not” is a phrase that serves as a section title while also accompanying two other ekphrastic poems entitled “Utan tittel, 1” [Untitled, 1] and “Utan tittel, 2” [Untitled, 2]. Conventionally such titles are used for artwork, not poetry. The poems were inspired by an exhibition by Per Maning at Museet for samtidskunst [The Museum of Modern Art] in Oslo in 2002.<sup>57</sup>

Utan tittel, 1

Bavianen Maggie tél fingrane sine  
 Om igjen og om igjen  
 Ho kjem visst til fire  
 Blikket hennar søker tilskodaren  
 Forsiktig? Fortvila?  
 Det er noe ved denne abstraksjonen  
 som ikkje vil bli konkret (55)

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<sup>57</sup> Per Maning’s exhibition was entitled *Now you see me, now you don’t*.



[Untitled, 1

The baboon Maggie is counting her fingers  
Again and again  
She seems to arrive at four  
Her glance seeks her audience  
Tentatively? Desperately?  
There is something about this abstraction  
that will not become concrete]

The critic Grete Nordtømme notes:

På utstillingen er det arrangert et møte dyr-menneske ved en kontinuerlig stor videoskjerm sort/hvit som viser Nils Sletta småsnakkende mot to rom med apen Maggie i formater 132 x 186 pluss et tilstøtende rom hvor det er en serie mindre bilder hvor apens uttrykk i øynene er forunderlig tankevekkende menneskelig.<sup>58</sup>

[The exhibition depicts a meeting between an animal and a human being by means of a continuous, large video screen in black and white showing Nils Sletta chatting towards two rooms with the ape Maggie in the size 132 x 186, plus an adjacent room where a series of smaller pictures show the ape's eye expression which is amazingly and thought-provokingly human.]

Lunden's poem describes a moving picture, a piece of video art—this fact adds additional preconditions that affect the interpretation differently than if the artwork was a (still) picture. Interestingly enough, we cannot determine from the text alone whether the reference is to a picture or to a film unless it is explicitly stated. In both the polar bear poem and the ape poem, the animal is textually animated in the same way, even though the poems describe distinct media. In the first

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<sup>58</sup> Grete Nordtømme *Kulturspeilet*.

case, the poem itself makes the reader aware that it concerns a picture; in the second, this information is communicated via semi-external textual clues (the titles).

The poem regarding Maggie the baboon is initially purely descriptive. The ape counts her fingers in an endless repetitive act and appears to reach four. Her gaze seeks the observer, and the poet asks whether her expression is careful or defeated. The poem concludes by noting that the abstraction refuses to concretize; the reader then must determine whether this observation refers to the baboon's counting. Are numbers too abstract even with the aid of actual fingers to illustrate the concept? Or is it the artwork itself that creates a space where the abstract and the concrete refuse to blend? In each case, the poem concludes by opening into a new question.

The following poem deals with a similar topic, but remains more closely aligned with the senses:

Utan tittel, 2

Mannsansiktet er nesten berre hud  
hud, hudporer og hud  
Munnen snakkar og snakkar, utan  
ein lyd. Smiler, smiler. Plutseleg  
blir vi urolege over noe vi  
ikkje høyrer (55)

[Untitled, 2

The man's face is almost entirely skin  
skin, pores, and skin  
The mouth speaking and speaking, without  
a sound. Smiling, smiling. Suddenly  
we become nervous about something we  
cannot hear]

The poem mimics the repetitive aesthetics of film in its verbal repetition—"hud" [skin], "snakkar" [speaking], "smiler" [smiling]. The

motif formed is synaesthetic, a collision of the senses: this figure causes uneasiness in its unnatural presence. The man's speech is speechless in a way that simulates an accomplishment of film. "Plutseleg / blir vi urolege over noe vi / ikkje høyrer" [Suddenly / we become nervous about something we / cannot hear]. The talking face is disturbing because its speech does not correspond to an actual, communicated meaning. The skin, the pores, the mouth, and the smile no longer look human but appear alien due to the absence of sound. This effect, of course, affects people differently, an observation that directs us toward a possible interpretation. Lunden illustrates the way in which the absence of sound, which is essentially a technical phenomenon in this context, contains both an aesthetic and a perceptual aspect. It also provides an unconventional expression in the lack of correlation between a smiling, speaking face and significant content. In this reading, the man's skin, as well as Maggie's fingers, end up as oddly abstracted concretes.

To draw this discussion of ekphrastic poems to a close, I wish to examine two poems that accentuate the more distressing aspects of this motif. Lunden seeks to remind us of the fact that an image is also a mental phenomenon. Toward the end of the first section, which has up to this point been completely peaceful, we encounter the following:

Frå eit rom under natta kjem gjennomtrengande skrik, nå  
 plagar han dyra igjen  
 Det kjem nye bølger med skrik  
 Eg riv opp døra til kjellaren. Den inste er tungt  
 blokkert. Eg greier å få vekk steinane, men  
 det tek lenger tid enn eg trudde. Noen ropar  
 i det døra gjev etter. Eg ser han stå der. I grå klær  
 Bortvend andlet. Det vanlege (16)

[From a room underneath the night come piercing screams, now  
 he is tormenting the animals again  
 New waves of screams  
 I tear open the door to the cellar. The inner door is heavily

blocked. I manage to get the stones away, but  
it takes longer than I thought. Someone's shouting  
as the door gives way. I see him standing there. In gray clothes  
Face turned away. The usual]

The violence appears suddenly—equally as sudden as the piercingly scream. “Frå eit rom under natta” [From a room underneath the night] reads figurally as an image of the events in a dream or as thoughts that surface from mysterious mental depths. But the poem maintains a concrete, narrative voice, and the two levels—the literal and the figural—preserve their autonomy, endowing the text with an allegorical quality.

On the narrative level we encounter a clear, temporally progressing storyline in which the poem's “I” looks for the source of the scream. But no surprising discovery is made. From the very beginning she realizes what is happening: “han” [he] is hurting the animals “igjen” [again]. Behind doors, stones, and other obstacles she finds the evil man: “Eg ser han stå der. I grå klær / Bortvend andlet. Det vanlege” [I see him standing there. In gray clothes / Face turned away. The usual]. The basement room prompts a doubled interpretation (cellars are generally psychologically connected with the unconscious).<sup>59</sup>

Lunden's basement poem demonstrates the characteristic traits of a nightmare in that it does not relate a singular phenomenon, but a repeated event. A faceless man in gray clothes recalls the image of a shadow; with this traumatic, violent poem, the shadow motif in the volume emerges with renewed force. Moreover, this motif does not appear in thematic isolation, but rather is linked to elements found in its next occurrence, which belongs to the latter section of the text and reveals a more explicit reference to visual art.

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<sup>59</sup> See, for example Gaston Bachelard: “As for the cellar, [...] it is first and foremost the *dark entity* of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces. When we dream there, we are in harmony with the irrationality of the depths” (*The Poetry of Space* 18).

Bildet av ein grå, urørleg mann med  
to uvanleg låge og lange hundar kjem til syne  
i hauståkeren

Dette er malplassert, tenker eg og leitar uvilkårleg  
etter noe frodig grønt å feste blikket på. Blikket glir  
over dei gylne trekronene på bakkekammen, mens  
eg ber van Goghs fuglar om å halde seg borte  
og ikkje dukke opp over åkeren live og  
demolestere teksten fullstendig ... fullstendig? (30)

[The picture of a gray unmoving man with  
two unusually lowslung and long dogs appears  
in the autumn field

This is out of place, I think and instinctively look  
for something lush and green to fix my gaze on. My eyes glide  
over the golden treetops on the hill, while  
I beg van Gogh's birds to stay away  
and not turn up live above the field to  
demolest the text entirely... entirely?]

Many of the major motifs in the volume come together in this poem: two animals, a gray man, a flock of birds, and a field. These motival elements join to stimulate both perception and memory, as well as their coupling in visual representation. The poem concludes in a manner that reflects the complex emotive power of these images as it begs that the text might remain intact.

The gray man is again shadowlike, this time due to his immobility, and the two extraordinary dogs do nothing to reverse this uncanny impression. But the man's image appears in the text, and this fact frames the interpretation in a particular way. The space between the man as a figure of direct observation and the man as a visual representation, invites our contemplation. The poem indicates that the view of the man is not necessarily a present observation, but an

image that occupies the subject's consciousness, causing the relationship between perception, imagination, and memory to blur.

The sight is far from pleasant—it is identified as “malplassert” [out of place]—and the subject tries to look at something else, something friendlier, hoping that the van Gogh's birds will not turn up. One of the final pictures painted by van Gogh before his suicide was entitled “Wheat Field with Crows” (1890). This work has been convincingly interpreted as a symbolization of van Gogh's fear of death. The anguish expressed in the poem's final verse resonates with van Gogh's painting and biography, as well as the poem's own thematic material. However, the line demands a careful reading as the first words seem to confirm the prophesy of demolition, while the final word—“fullstendig” [completely]—followed by a question mark, provides the conclusion with the space of uncertainty that allows for an interesting and perhaps even optimistic interpretation. The rhetorical question that leaves the poem undetermined reassures us that the answer will be “no”: van Gogh's crows will not destroy the text.

In this poem, Lunden investigates the borders between different modes of understanding. She describes a man with an indistinct ontological status, but whose existence implies a threat. This threat consists of the fact that the image seems to be capable of destroying the observer's life and the poet's art, irrespective of its own ontological status. Are the man and the two dogs perceived objects in nature, an inner mental projection, or both? When the poem's “I” imagines van Gogh's crows, they exist only as a purely visual representation, but in this context they have become alive and threaten to appear in the subject's own field of vision. The crows originate in a painting, but they evolve into a mental representation of an existential threat—a threat the poem is ultimately intended to handle. In this way, this poem appears to be a key text for the understanding of Lunden's ekphrastic aesthetic: here, many motifs converge to express an essential concern regarding the nature of image, both external and internal, and the act of representation.

Lunden's ekphrastic poems position the question of representation at the center of her poetics and function as aesthetic reflections on the relationship between verbal and visual art. This work reveals

an important aspect of modernist ekphrasis, which usually deals with anti-mimetic art and the crisis of representation. Lunden's larger scope of pictorial interest gives her work on these questions a distinct profile as she systematically links pictures to mental images as well as to the questions of memory, perception, and thought. Such a "theoretical" reading does not, of course, distract from the fact that pictures are objects that fascinate both our senses and our intellect: Lunden's love for the visual arts most certainly emerges from its own unique expressive quality, just as her poems reflect a similarly singular synthesis of textual sensuality and mental engagement.





## 4. Perception: Synaesthesia and its Sensual Sources

Our senses perform different tasks: eyes see, ears hear, and skin can feel. Poetic language, however, enables the senses to exceed their natural capacity. Words not only refer to perceptual experiences, but intermix them as well. This particular transcendence occurs via rhetoric combination and the synaesthetic trope, which not only makes it possible for an eye to listen and an ear to smell, but also changes the perception of the world through these linguistic illusions.

The reader of Lunden's poetry soon encounters the sophisticated manner in which her words articulate impressions made by the body and its sensual apparatuses. In Lunden's poems, perception provides a basic mode for experiencing the phenomenal world. We realize the surprising variety inherent in the sense qualities as they "touch" reality. Within the framework of Lunden's perceptual aesthetic, synaesthesia acts as a characteristic rhetorical trope, a fact that causes a number of significant effects. Through examples from both her early and later work, I will focus on Lunden's poetic exploration through synaesthesia into perceptual acts and their relationships to physical and mental experiences.

### The Synaesthetic Trope

"Synaesthesia in literature is the phenomenon wherein one sense modality is felt, perceived, or expressed in terms of another, e.g. describing a voice as velvety, warm, heavy, or sweet, or a trumpet-blast as scarlet ('To the bugle,' says Emily Dickinson, 'every color is red')" states *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Preminger and Brogan 1259). Further, the effects of these intersensory analogues for the most part have been interpreted as an "increase of textual richness, complication, and unification."

Much of the critical work concerning literary synaesthesia has been done in relation to Symbolism and essentially follows the doctrines of the French symbolists, for whom the correspondence between the senses themselves as well as between the senses and reality served as a main theme. The harmony-seeking and unifying tendencies found in Symbolist poetry are particularly evident in the second stanza of Baudelaire's sonnet "Correspondences" from *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857):

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent,  
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,  
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,  
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

[Like prolonged echoes mingling in the distance  
In a deep and tenebrous unity,  
Vast as the dark of night and as the light of day,  
Perfumes, sounds, and colors correspond.]<sup>60</sup>

Louise Vinge's *The Five Senses* (1975) is one of the most thorough Scandinavian works on the topic of synaesthesia. She traces synaesthetic connections from antiquity up through the modernist poetry of Erik Lindegren. Her readings are sympathetic to the intentions of New Criticism when she seeks to define the effects of unity in complex experiences, seeing them as primarily inspired by mythology and religion. She comments on Lindegren's poem "De fem sinnenas dans" [The dance of the five senses] (1946):<sup>61</sup>

att smaka en djupare glömska att gömma  
att höra zenit närma sig och katarakten  
att känna dina lemmars syn under mina händer  
och dina fyrars doft över våra månars gata

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<sup>60</sup> Translation by William Aggeler.

<sup>61</sup> The translation here is most likely by Louise Vinge.

[to taste a deeper forgetfulness to hide  
to hear zenith approaching and the cataract  
to feel the sight of your limbs under my hands  
and the smell of your lighthouses over the street of our moons]

Vinge observes:

“By means of the construction ‘to feel the sight ... and the smell’ Lindegren condenses three senses into one act of perception; he complicates, in ‘the smell of your lighthouses,’ the perception even further—something visible is smelled, and the smell is perceived by the touching hand. The senses are united, just as the two individuals are united, in a mystical union.”<sup>62</sup>

It is interesting to note that a certain theoretical bias governs the interpretation; however, Vinge is correct to stress the perceptual force evident in Lindengren’s poem. Modernist poetry frequently involves things not only as they are, but also as they appear to a perceiving subject.

My goal here, then, is to analyze similar connections found in Lunden’s work. I believe that her intersensory imagery has to do with a deeply rooted interest in perception and its bodily source. In the important yet cautious investigation of the interface between nature and body, Lunden experiments with the sense modalities and their various interactions. The focus of this poetical practice is neither a quest for unity nor a proof of difference, but rather an open exploration of the infinite varieties through which we sense, perceive, and reflect upon our changing experience of the phenomenal world.

## Early Poems

The opening poem in Lunden’s first published collection, *f.eks. juli*, is titled “Ur-klang” [Past chimes], a metaphorical expression signifying the double meaning found in a chime as both a sound marking the present (a clock chime) and a sound that recalls the past (as

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<sup>62</sup> Louise Vinge, *The Five Senses* 179.

memory). The chime also provides a concrete way to relate the experience of time to the senses and to music.

Ur-klang

Sekund for sekund  
kjem eg tikkande fram  
av meg sjølv,  
framtid er berre  
langvisarar, fortid  
ein metallisk klang  
i klokka.

Eg veit  
at langvisarane  
slår fast  
summen av sekunda,  
eg høyrer  
at klokka er  
umusikalsk. (7)

[Past chimes

Second by second  
I emerge ticking  
of my own accord,  
the future is merely  
minute hands, the past  
a metallic ring  
in the clock.

I know  
the minute hands  
state  
the sum of seconds,  
I hear

the clock is  
out of tune.]

As the opening poem of the collection, “Ur-klang” focuses on resonance as it works through bygone dissonances. I suggest that this poem may be read as a verbal image of the tonal quality of poetry itself: past sounds coexist simultaneously with present ticking and the minutehand’s continual addition carries within it the future. These sounds comprise a metaphorical melding of life in both time and space. As such, the poem deals with the capacity of poetry to express multiple memories without erasing their intrinsic lack of harmony. It functions as an introduction to the following poems, and perhaps even to Lunden’s entire poetic project as it demonstrates to the reader the creation of future sound through the development of an awareness of the echoes from the past.

The following poem works through a non-harmonic sense mixture, where sight can hear, hearing can see, and sounds are colored.

Om snø

I den svarte snøen hørest  
blå hoste,  
kjem alle steg  
grå, kryp alle  
svarte kattar  
kvite,  
i den kvite skogen  
raknar plutseleg augnelokk,  
og du ser kor stilt  
det var. (9)

[On snow

In the black snow is heard  
a blue cough,  
all footsteps

gray, all black  
cats creep  
white,  
in the white wood  
eyelids suddenly unravel,  
and you see how quiet  
it was.]

The poem creates a disturbing impression, an effect partly due to its cross-sensual rhetoric found in its synaesthetic tropes, such as “blå hoste” [blue cough] and “ser kor stilt” [see how quiet]. Additionally, the poem contains adjectives that fail to correspond with normal perceptual descriptions, or that are contradictory: “svart snø” [black snow] and “kryp alle / svarte kattar / kvite” [all black / cats creep / white].

The musical quality of a poem is primarily connected with the elements of sound and rhythm. This poem presents these musical elements as components of a non-harmonic sound space. The trochaic meter of the opening line is interrupted in the next line by another meter; the disrupted rhythm hobbles along. The poetic music seems to solidify in the final line, yet a change of tense in “det var” [it was] contradicts the impression that the objects perceived throughout the poem are actually present in the here and now. Thus, the temporal structure of the poem is problematized so that the text simultaneously references both past and present.

The re-encounter of an earlier experience is made possible as the “raknar plutseleg augnelokk” [eyelids suddenly unravel]. The act of looking back can then occur because the eyelid no longer prevents the eye from seeing, yet the metaphoric image behind this opening of the eye is something both disturbing and painful. In addition to the implied present action, the past has also changed: it is no longer full of colliding perceptions; instead, it has become silent. Through these contrasting temporal spaces, the poem opens a potential competition between dissonance and silence. Reality’s dependence upon a perceiving subject results in a reality that changes according to shifts in time, place, and point of view. Even though the poem ends with the

possibility for a revised version of the past as the various sounds and the uncertain gaze are perceived in new ways, the sinister atmosphere created through the imagery of the black snow, blue cough, and creeping cats survives as the dominant thematic content.

The following poem addresses the subject of memory more explicitly, as the recollection of a dream:

Då eg vakna

Då eg vakna, var det av  
granene, tungt jaga  
som sjølve jorda,

og flaumvatnet  
på nye og listige vegar,

eg hugsa  
ein liten søvn langt inne  
i vinden og  
ei rusta røyst.

[When I awoke

When I awoke, it was from  
the firs, chased  
like the earth itself,

and the flood water  
in new insidious channels,

I remembered  
a small sleep far inside  
the wind and  
a rusty voice.]

The lyrical subject is split into three parts: a present narrator, a past-

remembering subject, and a past-experiencing subject. The narrator adds distance to the experiencing subject and also introduces the narrative as a dream. Dream and reality appear as two completely separate worlds, but upon closer examination we can observe that both spheres are described through metaphors, causing once-distinct differences to become blurred.

The subject is awakened by “granene, tungt jaga / som sjøve jorda” [firs, hunted down / like the earth itself] and “flaumvatnet / på nye og listige vegar” [the flood water / in new insidious channels]. The landscape is threatening, but like the fir trees, it is itself also threatened as indicated through the landscape’s anthropomorphic traits: “jaga” [hunted] and “listige” [insidious]. The dream in the third stanza is “langt inne” [far inside] and appears to be located at a safe distance away from the intimidating outer landscape. However, the final words, “rusta røyst” [rusty voice], indicate a sound potentially both human and dangerous. The environment remains unsafe, both inside and outside the lyrical voice.

In all three poems, I identify a fusion of time and space that foregrounds the difficulty inherent in defining boundaries between present and past, here and there. This phenomenon parallels the trope of synaesthesia, although synaesthesia contains other more specified qualities and effects. It tends to simultaneously erase and underscore the expected demarcation between the senses through its semantic collisions. Compared to the Symbolist use of synaesthesia, Lunden’s poems utilize the trope as part of a consciously non-harmonic poetics, thus creating friction, tension, and disruption.

A more moderate deployment of synaesthesia is evident in Lunden’s *Inneringa*, where the trope is often connected with knowledge as a bodily phenomenon as acts of perception mediate the traditional distance between intellectual comprehension and embodied awareness:

Hausten set eit bleikt teikn  
i sommarens farge, når all lyd  
har falle til jorda, tek elvane over  
regnet og fører det bort. (33)



[Autumn leaves a pale mark  
on the color of summer, when all sound  
has fallen to the ground, the rivers take over  
the rain and carry it away.]

Har ho mørker i kroppen?  
Nei, ho har augnevipper  
som stryk dagen over  
i skugge. (71)

[Is there darkness in her body?  
No, she has eyelashes  
that stroke the day  
into shade.]

Natt i skogen  
og ein som varsamt  
legg varmen omkring henne  
med sin eigen,

ventar heilt til morgonen  
på at nattehimmelen skal mørkne  
i henne og gå til ro. (84)

[Night in the forest  
and one who gently  
wraps his warmth around her  
with his own,

waiting right until morning  
for the night sky to darken  
in her and come to rest.]

A sensual plurality—seeing, touching, and hearing—is activated in these poems in order to describe things in terms of their qualities and articulate the mind of the girl with the slim body. The synaesthesia

evident in the dampened tone concretizes the ways in which poetry assembles sense modalities in new ways.

Two additional poems from the same collection demonstrate a slightly different application of the trope. They belong to the last section of the book and describe the subject of the poem revisiting a familiar landscape. Visual impressions are dominant in the depictions of a sea, a beach, a road beside the sea, and a house. The poetic motifs include rain and sun; old women and a child; flowers, leaves, and a forest; and oil gravel on the road. The poems focus on visually perceived objects as well as the relationship between nature, human beings, and the perceiving subject:

I det dei stig ut av bilen  
går ei dirring av lyst metall gjennom kroppen. Det vesle regnet som er,  
stikk i bluseryggen. (61)

[As they get out of the car  
a tremor of light metal goes through my body. The little rain there is,  
stings the back of my blouse.]

Here, Lunden explores the displacement between a sense's source and the resultant effects not as a psychological phenomenon, but rather through the rhetoric of synaesthesia. The expression "lyst metall" [light metal] refers back to the aforementioned car, but as the metal quivers through the body (and thus becomes, in a sense, subjected to the flesh) a peculiar combination of lightness and metallic lust occurs.<sup>63</sup> Accordingly, the "vesle regnet" [little rain] does not fall lightly on sensitive skin, but "stikk i bluseryggen" [stings the back of my blouse], indicating a more forceful strike, like that of a shower. Stimuli from outside not only touch the skin but also possibly enter the body itself.

A similar synaesthetic confusion of nouns and attributes is at work in the following poem:

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<sup>63</sup> This convergence is more readily apparent in the Norwegian: the Norwegian word "lyst" denotes both "light" and "desire."

Det blir stummande grønt. Klærne til ei gamal kvinne mørknar og mjuknar. Ei krykke og ein stav lyser gult. Regnet er varsamt på veg tett over henne. (62)

[It gets pitch green. The clothes of an old woman darken and soften. A crutch and a stick glow yellow. The rain is gently on its way straight over her.]

The first sentence is a variation of the idiomatic expression “stummande mørkt” [pitch dark], which in Norwegian signifies a combination of “mute” and “dark.” A mute darkness is, of course, technically impossible, yet, if we ascribe the observation to a perceiving subject, it becomes potentially viable. The image may indicate a darkness so overwhelming that it defies the descriptive capacity of language, or simply imply that there are no sounds to be heard. In Lunden’s poetics the muteness is not dark, but green; the darkness has been displaced to the description of the old lady. Her clothes “mørknar og mjuknar” [darken and soften]; they literally dissolve before the watchful eye, an action that leaves the precise interpretive meaning similarly vague. How do clothes become darker and softer?

I propose that in using this imagery, Lunden does not primarily intend to describe actual persons and the things. Rather, she instead indirectly addresses the physical surroundings and the way in which the environment affects the subject’s perception. We can well imagine the setting sun and increasing darkness and the falling rain that softens the landscape or covers the windshield as the wipers steadily push it away. Perhaps the yellow glow of the crutch and the stick even evokes the image of a woman wearing reflectors. At the same time, another reading may instead focus on the thematic or emotional content underneath the synaesthetic surface, detecting a gloomy or destructive tone that may imply a sudden or unexpected death.

In these poems, friction and disharmony are not the most significant synaesthetic effects. It is worth noting that the trope points to the connection between the senses and perception itself. This method is, in a way, identical to that implicit in Symbolism. Lunden’s poems produce an effect of richness and wholeness, while also calling atten-

tion to perception and the mediating role the body plays in experiencing the world.

The connection between perception and embodiment is clarified in the poems from *hard, mjuk*. These poems express the fragility of the senses alongside a desire for contact and confirmation mixed with a timid attitude toward words and voices. Accordingly, ambiguity characterizes the individual poems:

Det lette lyset  
i han, tynt langs underarmane  
knapt høyrleg i halsgropa, og  
hendene hennar så plutseleg redd  
alt han lever mot huda. (85)

[The easy light  
in him, thin along his forearms  
barely audible in the hollow of his neck, and  
her hands so suddenly afraid  
of all his life against the skin.]

The opening expression, “lette lyset” [easy light], mixes distinct sense impressions: the combination of vision and touch creates an atmosphere of emotional ease. The “lette lyset” [easy light] is located “i han” [in him]: it appears “tynt langs underarmane” [thin along his forearms] and is “knapt høyrleg i halsgropa” [barely audible in the hollow of his neck]. Yet, the woman’s feelings are ultimately ambiguous. She suddenly becomes afraid, or rather, her *hands* are suddenly afraid—perhaps they have touched too much. The poem’s final line continues the theme of ambiguity. The hands are afraid because “alt han lever” [all his life]—a startling, uncontrolled vitality—is suddenly apparent in or through the skin itself. However, we are left with the uncertainty regarding the identity of this skin: does it belong to her hands, or the man himself? This doubled doubt (what, specifically, is it about the man’s life that is dangerous? To whom does the skin belong?) thematically underscores the conflict evidenced through the synaesthetic topos of the poem: the subjectivi-

ty inherent in embodied perception necessarily precludes the definitive certainty of knowledge.

In *Inneringa* and *hard, mjuk* Eldrid Lunden explores synaesthesia, moving beyond its identity as a rhetorical structure and toward its deliberate use in an integrated philosophical exploration. Lunden studies the subtle tensions between sensing, perceiving, and feeling in order to foreground the underlying ambiguity inherent in existence. Focusing less on the surrounding things and landscapes than on the individual's attitudes and experiences of them, these poems stress how Lunden's modernist aesthetics represent a fundamentally phenomenological approach.

## Later Poems

In Lunden's most recent book, *Flokken og skuggen* (2005), we encounter a heightened use of synaesthetic expressions, which helps to flesh out the theme of perception, particularly in terms of a dynamic between presence and absence.

The first section of the book is called "Varmen i dyresporet" [The heat in the animal's tracks], a poetic expression of something that, more abstractly, may be identified as the presence of absence. The animal, no longer physically present, is instead evoked through the traces of its passing: the warm tracks, still visible, offer up the past presence of the beast. This absent presence is intriguingly challenging. Is it possible to touch a track and feel heat? Technically possible, yes, but that possibility is undeniably hypothetical and quite unlikely for the majority of the present human population. This hypothetical quality gives the word "Varmen" [the heat] a figurative meaning in addition to the literal. In other words, heat is not only something perceived by the senses, but also serves as a metaphor. As such, the heat in the animal's tracks exists as something more than pure sensation; it simultaneously signifies an experience that lies outside the perceptual powers of the senses and instead is accessed on a deeper, linguistic level. This experience is one that can only be expressed through language: it is in language that we find the rhetorical structures and symbolizing processes necessary to approach the

ontological and significative paradoxes and problems inherent in our human experiences.

Skuggar i snøen

i grålysinga. To dyr ute på sletta

eg står i vindauga

i snøen i det lydlause auget (9)

[Shadows in the snow

at dusk. Two animals out in the open

I stand at the window

in the snow in the soundless eye]

The poem circles around the visual: it ultimately concerns the act of seeing, and it opens up a field of vision through shadows, soon identified as two animals. The lyrical subject stands at the window, watching the animals. Alliteration and assonance unite the elements of the poem, and the repetition of the word “snøen” [snow] along with the similar sounds in “vindauga” [window] and “auge” [eye] (approximated in English through the rhyme in “window,” “shadow,” and “snow”) create an intimacy between the one who sees and the observed object. The sense of hearing is brought into the poem at the end through the synaesthesia “det lydlause auget” [the soundless eye]. However, there is no sound to hear, only silence; therefore, the synaesthetic effect is more concerned with highlighting the silence in connection with sight—as if it were an absence—than introducing a new sense quality. In the end, it accomplishes both tasks.

The shadows in the poem are not directly depicted as the shadows of the two animals; instead they are the visual trace of the animals visible before they have been identified as animals. The shadows remain in the snow. In the morning light we perceive the shadow as a visual phenomenon that creates a contour against the white snow.

This contour remains out of focus due to the obscure quality of the light that appears on the threshold between night and day. Hence, the poem—and the book—introduce a gaze directed toward an object, “To dyr ute på sletta” [Two animals out in the open], but they also underscore the way in which the object is seen. This dual investigation of the gaze is achieved by placing the observing eye in front of a window in combination with the changing description of the animals: first as shadows, and later as themselves. The last line, “i snøen i det lydlause auget” [in the snow in the soundless eye], continues to elaborate the theme of uncertain perception as it is unclear from the text who, exactly, is standing in the snow. Is it the animals or the perceiving subject? Furthermore, the location of the snow itself is put into question—is the snow actually outside in the open or is it instead an interior phenomenon (the softly obscured inner eye)?

In a continuation on this motif, Lunden introduces the act of speech while underlining the problematic connection between observation and language.

Varmen i dyresporet. Skuggen  
som flimrar

Det finst noe å seie  
Og det finst  
noe som vil vise seg (13)

[The heat in the animal's tracks. The shadow  
flickering

There is something to say  
And there is  
something that wants to show itself]

The perceived phenomena in the first part of the poem function as an argument for the conclusion drawn in the second part, which twice stresses that “noe” [something] exists. This “something” is not defined, but remains shimmering in its indistinct conceptualization,

flickering like a shadow and warm like a track. Again, the perception of the object is emphasized rather than the object itself. The poem insists that this “something” can be verbalized (an act that implies a previous perception and/or conception) and a subsequent, although not necessarily connected, appearance. The white space—the visual gap—between the two segments of the poem should not be overlooked: it produces a verbal and spatial silence, a pause and an open space, between observation and reflection. The poem may be read as a metacommentary on the volume as a whole as it expresses and defines a problem for discussion within the framework of a specific intention. The task at hand is to represent, with words, phenomena that exist as sensations, memories, and experiences, albeit without definitive existential contours. Many surprising aspects of this objective surface in the following poem:

Lytteøvelse mot snøen

Noe pirkar i den manglande lyden

Og så eg som nesten aldri har sett bjørn!  
Berre bjørnejegerar (14)

[Listening test, against snow

Something is scratching in the missing sound

And I who have hardly ever seen a bear!  
Only bear hunters]

The poem investigates the silence in an act identified as a “listening test.” Sound would seem to be absent (the silence in which the listening test takes place), yet still conceptually present, though “objectified”: something scratches in it. To scratch in the missing sound creates a double paradox, since scratching in a sound is physically impossible. Furthermore, the sound is specifically identified as “missing” and therefore doubly lacks the substantiality that would



allow it to be subjected to a scratching session. I interpret Lunden's rhetoric here as an attempt to verbalize a specific feeling that reflects the sensation of a sound that can be perceived without being heard. This paradox may indicate that a sense of reality is possible without the presence of any perceived objects; an experience may be real even if nothing is being sensed, as if it takes place in the sensory-deprived lack or void.

The final two lines read somewhat like a riddle, and at first glance they appear to have little to do with the rest of the poem. However, a thematic connection between the sections of the poem remains: there may be tracks from a bear in the snow. There is an underlying connection between the present-absence complex of the animal track in the snow and the scratching at a missing sound. Indeed, the snow itself would silence the sound of the bear moving across the land while simultaneously witnessing the physical trace of the same movement in the track. There is also a perceptual link between the lines that can be connected to the tension between the sensed object and the sensing subject. This link deals with a change of viewpoint from a missing object (the bear) to another, observable object (the bear hunters). Just as the thematic pairs of presence and absence, silence and sound, and embodiment and concept promote an interpretation that favors indeterminacy, this shifting viewpoint likewise foregrounds the unknown (and ultimately unknowable) identity of the observing eye. This ending provides the poem with a lightly comic touch that mitigates the intimidating experience of perceiving something that is not there.

There are, not surprisingly, several sections in *Flokken og skuggen* that imbue the perception of a missing or absent object with a far more alarming content. The bear connotes the qualities of strength and danger, albeit they are not manifest to any great extent in the poem discussed above. A more current, political example, however, develops this increasingly dangerous thematic.

17.09.01

Bin laden, bin Laden, bin Laden ... summar det i  
den stille septemberskogen

den vesle lyden som isar  
igjennom er ikkje ein ny type mobiltelefon. Det er

ein fugl, tenker eg og merkar hovudet snu seg  
langsamt etter sin tanke (25)

[17.09.01

Bin laden, bin Laden, bin Laden ... buzzing  
in the silent September woods

the small sound icing  
through is not a new mobile phone. It's

a bird, I think, and notice my head turning  
slowly following its thought]

The dangerous name, bin Laden, is obtrusive with its repetitive, humming presence. The first line mimes the dial tone, along with its frightening associations. It occurs in stark contrast to the peace and quiet of the September forest evoked in the following line. By way of the synaesthetic expression, "lyden som isar" [sound icing], the listening ear becomes associated with something cold. The sound replicates the sensation of coldness and the sound of attacking arrows though its repetition of the sibilant "s." When viewed objectively, these sensations have nothing to do with the sound itself, but rather connect thematically with bin Laden.

This fact is acknowledged when the sound is rejected as being a noise from a new type of cell phone and when the lyrical subject finds a pleasant explanation: a bird! Perhaps this rationalization is plausible, yet the fear remains, and the subject's thoughts turn slowly toward this fear. On the following page, Lunden describes these thoughts more extensively, all of which concern Afghanistan.

As we can observe, Lunden foregrounds the manner in which the intellectual response emerges before the physical reaction, which is thereby secondary. The poem questions the temporal succession of events in at least two ways: there is the repetition of the name, puls-

ing like the dial tone, which, through the content of that name, creates associations with an international terrorist, otherwise absent. Perhaps the tone actually does originate with a bird? The relief at this consideration evokes a bodily reaction and the head literally turns, following its thought to the likely physical location of the object of its thought. In both cases, Lunden describes a process contrary to our usual expectations, namely, that an object provokes a perception that in turn creates a thought. Instead, we have the poeticized practice of the opposite process. The poem demonstrates that a strong experience is enough not only to color the perception of completely different objects, but also to entirely dominate this perception. The head that slowly turns toward the thought reminds us of the need to accept this knowledge.

A much quicker event is presented in this short poem, almost haiku-like in its verbal compactness.

November

Fuktig motlys

Det nakne treet. Og det vesle dyret  
som plutselig fer til topps  
mellom greinene (33)

[November

Damp glare

the bare tree. And the small animal  
suddenly scrambling to the top  
among the branches]

Here the synaesthetic expression “fuktig motlys” [damp glare] evokes a wealth of sensual connotations that center around the perception of the object: a small animal advancing at full speed to the top of a naked tree. “November” suggests a dark and cold season, and the damp glare expresses the combination of rain and sun in a remarkably concrete and physical manner.

Into this frame, which is at once visual and tactile with a calmness commonly associated with that of the still life, Lunden places her small animal and thus gives the image a sudden glimpse of life. Without explicitly naming it as such, the poem creates the image of a gray-brown squirrel with quick movements and a bushy tail. The poem forms a pure image of nature, but it also lends itself to a continued reflection on poetics. This aesthetic dimension surfaces through the poem's synaesthetic imagery: the damp glare also connotes the image of an oil painting or a saturated watercolor, each retaining the quality of wetness. Perhaps this interpretation stretches the text too far, but it does point to an integral quality of verbal language that arises when a blending of senses occurs. In other words, synaesthetic expressions, in their unnatural juxtaposition, open up language beyond its conventional interpretive possibilities. The outer reaches of a word's denotative and connotative power come into play in the logical gap that emerges in the synaesthetic collision. These perceptual interactions demonstrate how it is possible to blur the distinctions between the described objects to such a degree that it is difficult to ascertain whether they are, in fact, signs or reality.

The next poem extends Lunden's probing by directly focusing on how to differentiate between such diverse modes of appearance.

Noe skin uforklarleg. Mellom avblomstra skuggar  
som raslar langs stiane. I det kjølege auget som  
rører auget. Og vi har lenge ant det. At vi ein gong  
skal nå eit punkt der vi ikkje riktig maktar å skilje  
det samtidige frå alt som er samtidig. Vinteren kan  
komme. (34)

[Something is shining inexplicably. Between unblossomed shadows  
rustling along the paths. In the cool eye that  
moves the eye. We have long suspected this. That we at some time  
will reach a point where we cannot quite distinguish  
the contemporary from everything that is contemporary. Winter may  
set in.]

Like the small animal running through the branches, this poem also focuses on something that occurs in an open, undefined space, something that glimmers mysteriously between the shadows of faded flowers. The poet has created a magical spot that appeals to the readers due to its concrete and recognizable description of passing time. Logically, the faded shadows are impossible to see. This impossibility is perhaps the presence that shines between the lines of the poem. Indeed, the shadow in this context becomes an image of the flower that once was there but is no longer perceived, a construct similar to that of memory. Moreover, the synaesthesia widens the space of perception. Shadows rustle along the tracks and thus they can also be heard in addition to being seen. Indeed, it seems as if the flowers continue to live in memory as sound rather than the expected image.

The link to memory is strengthened as the text continues, mentioning something that “vi” [we] have assumed for a long time, namely, that it will be difficult in the future to distinguish “det samtidige frå alt som er samtidig” [the contemporary from everything that is contemporary]. Consequently, the poem juxtaposes three temporal dimensions by pointing both to past times and also to the future, ultimately finding the present to be indistinct and undifferentiated. It is most likely that this imagery refers to the shadows, which can be distinguished from the flowers themselves only with difficulty as both the perception and the memories demonstrate a similar strength.

The future-oriented perspective is also evident in the reference to the approaching winter. The faded shadows indicate the approaching winter, which lies as a hidden prophecy among them. Not only can these shadows be seen, they can also be touched. This tangibility is evidenced through the cold eye and its presentation in a loop-like sentence: “I det kjølege auget som / rører auget” [In the cool eye that moves the eye]. Lunden makes use of this expressive construction two times; twice words are repeated and the sentence proceeds to circle back on itself, biting itself, as it were, on the tail. This structure creates interpretive opacity on one level, but on another, it becomes a significant echo of the poem’s claim that the faded flowers are impossible to perceive without simultaneously remembering both

their past blossom and their future death in the approaching winter. In this way, the poem demonstrates how perception unavoidably mingles with both intangible memories and concrete experiences.

Finally, let us turn to a very short poem that refers back to the previously mentioned linguistic issue (“Det finst noe å seie” [There is something to say]), albeit in a different manner.

Universets

diskurs

i ein tørr liten lyd av spytt (76)

[The discourse

of the universe

in a dry little sound of spit]

There is a vast abstract perspective that opens up with the words “Universets / diskurs” [The discourse / of the universe], however, this openness suddenly contracts into a concrete “liten lyd” [little sound]. In other words, the poem covers a large spatiality with very few words. The first two words reference well-known scientific language, while the rest of the text takes place in poetic expression.

Again, it is interesting to examine how the synaesthesia functions in the text. The expression “dry little sound of spit” juxtaposes several sense categories, notably “tørr” [dry] and “spytt” [spit], which belong to the tactile sense (but intriguingly convey opposite qualities), and “lyd” [sound], which belongs to hearing. Additionally, we encounter a somewhat synaesthetic anomaly in the phrase “liten lyd” [little sound]: a sound occurs through time and thus short, rather than little, would normally be used to convey a quantitative temporal quality. Alternatively, sound is scaled in terms of volume as high or low. This scaling, however, is again subtly distinct from the spatial concepts of big and little. To summarize, “ein tørr liten lyd av spytt” [a dry little sound of spit] is an impossible phenomenon, yet, as a characteristic of “Universets / diskurs” [The discourse / of the universe] perhaps this aporia is appropriate. The poem transforms an abstract phenomenon into a concrete one, managing to create a sen-

sual language, while simultaneously tending to its mental and epistemological dimensions.

In her most recent collection, Lunden develops her synaesthetic rhetoric into novel, subtle forms. Her interest in the relationship between sensing, perceiving, and understanding the world by bodily means is broadened into an investigation of the space where phenomena and feelings both exist and do not exist, as, for example, in memories and anticipations. The poetic expression also evokes absence in terms of something missing or lost that is also, alternatively, present.

## Poetry of Perception

The senses Lunden commonly evokes in her work include sight, hearing, and touch; smell and taste are somewhat less present. This preference is in line with a generally accepted differentiation of the senses that ranks vision and hearing as “higher” and the others as “lower.” This hierarchal thinking has been explained by the fact that the higher senses can perceive at a greater distance, while the lower senses require the object to be closer to the body.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, I believe that Lunden’s poems demonstrate a modification of this convention. In her poems, the synaesthetic tropes are intimately integrated in an exploration of the vague yet essential interface between perception and knowledge, sensation and meaning. In this exploration, apart from differences in frequency, differences in aesthetic quality are hard to detect.

Essentially, Lunden’s synaesthetic tropes participate in poetic explorations of perception, representation, and thought. As such, they generally operate as both a challenge to, and a transgression of, familiar categories of knowledge. The effect of various perceptual interactions is chiefly the expression of logically inconceivable phenomena and conditions; thus, they reveal the indistinct borders of experience as well as a dimension of understanding that refrains from well-defined description and rational explanation. However,

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. Erik Steinskog, “Being Touched by Art. Art and Sense in Jean-Luc Nancy.”

they fundamentally belong to our bodily and mental approaches to the phenomenal world.

In the first volume, *f.eks. juli*, the synaesthetic expressions tend at once to both erase and emphasize the demarcation between the senses. The poems in Lunden's first book include the trope in a sort of disharmonious poetics, thus creating friction, tension, and disturbance. In *Inneringa* and *hard, mjuk*, disharmony is not the most important effect of synaesthesia; instead, the trope points to the connection between senses and the phenomena in a more fundamental way, thus calling attention to perception and the way we experience the world through the body. Lunden's *Flokker og skuggen*, is a sophisticated exploration of the various possibilities and effects of synaesthesia—accordingly, one-dimensional readings necessarily fail. Extensive use of synaesthetic expressions is a part of Lunden's broader exploration into questions of perception, and as implied by this intention, the poems investigate the premises of memories, knowledge, and expectations. Eldrid Lunden's synaesthetic imagery is intertwined with a profound and heightened interest in perception and its bodily preconditions and intellectual implications.



## 5. Parody: Long Ears and Naughty Lips

I want to end my reading of Lunden by foregrounding an aspect of her style that has appeared in the preceding chapters, but never as the focal point: the humor that no reader—or indeed listener—can avoid noticing. I have touched upon Lunden’s use of humor several times, most notably when a poem hovers between the modal extremes of sincerity and amusement. In such cases, humor unsettles the text, making the reader uncertain as to its meaning. That is, of course, exactly its intended effect and part of what makes Lunden’s humor such an intriguing quality in her writing. But there is more to Lunden’s poetic laughter. To further this investigation into the significance of Lunden’s humor, I will discuss several poems from *Slik Sett*.

### Body Talk

Introducing a motto from Nietzsche’s *Götterdämmerung* [*Twilight of the Idols*] (1889), *Slik Sett* positions itself as philosophy, mythology, and comedy: “Jeg finder et slags humor i dine ører, Ariadne, hvorfor er de ikke endnu længere?” [I find a kind of humor in your ears, Ariadne, why are they not even longer?]. Henri Bergson writes in his essay on laughter that comedy balances between art and life.<sup>65</sup> This is indeed an apt description of *Slik Sett*. But the question of humor and humorous effects is difficult; for example, the fact that a text may be humorless when read to oneself and yet strikingly funny when listened to aloud, problematizes the nature of textual humor. Lunden’s poems simply *are* funnier when the poet herself reads them onstage than when read slowly by myself in my armchair. The body, the voice, the author’s intentions, and the collective thrill of the audi-

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<sup>65</sup> Henri Bergson, “Laughter.”

ence certainly enhance the humorous dimensions of a complete performance of a poem.

The humor begins in *Slik Sett*, as noted above, with Ariadne's ears, which according to Nietzsche (or rather Dionysus) are not long enough. The fact that the body and its physiognomy serve as main comic sources is well known, as is the fact that the occurrence of deviant proportions and bodily deformations often are appropriated to serve comic sensibilities. "Now, certain deformities undoubtedly possess over others the sorry privilege of causing some persons to laugh," Bergson writes in a partial explanation of the effects of an intensification of ugliness.<sup>66</sup> Nietzsche's text also invokes another law of laughter, one emphasized by Mikhail Bakhtin in his works on medieval carnivals, namely the fact that a combination—and permutation—of the high and the low invites ridicule.<sup>67</sup> In this case, Nietzsche addresses the mythic persona of Ariadne with an unexpected question regarding her long ears (instead of her intelligence, longing, sorrow, etc.).

Ariadne's ears exemplify burlesque humor in Lunden's text, an identification that falls outside the generally accepted tradition regarding Ariadne. However, Ariadne's thread may be read as an analogy to the humorous undertone in *Slik Sett*. It exists as does background music, not always audible, not easily described, and it does not immediately foreground the ridiculous. Lunden's humor is subtle and refined. It does not force itself onto the reader, causing roars of laughter, but rather it is understated and slightly ironic. Her humor acts as an intellectual mode associated with a playful and unrestrained attitude toward the world. It does not laugh *at* someone with viciousness and pride; it does not quite laugh *with* someone either—instead it utilizes a finely tuned sense of humor in order to cast a fresh light upon something from a slightly removed distance. This humor serves as an embedded resource in the perspectival strategy called "slik sett" [seen that way].

The following prose poem contains a warm humor; it also develops laughter and sight as explicit motifs:

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<sup>66</sup> Bergson, "Laughter" 75.

<sup>67</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*.

Dei tre vandrar omkring i gammal-nytt butikken  
og finn rare ting som berre kan bli rare når tre par  
auge ser samtidig. Sjå her er glashøner! Og kva med eit  
glasauge? Plutseleg kjøper den eine kvinna eit stort  
halsband av glasperler, og alle tre ler hjarteleg.  
Mannen bøyer seg over kvinna med halsbandet og dei blir  
ståande lenge og snakke om glasperler. Køyr forsiktig!  
seier han med låg røyst til den andre kvinna i det ho er  
på veg ut døra, og ho høyrer at han har fått eit snev av  
optimisme i stemma (284)

[The three are browsing in a second-hand shop  
finding odd things that only become funny when three pairs of  
eyes see them together. Look, glass pussycats! And what about a  
glass eye? All of a sudden one of the women buys a huge  
necklace of glass beads and they all laugh heartily.  
The man bends down over the woman with the necklace and they have  
a long conversation about glass beads. Drive carefully!  
he says in a low voice to the other woman as she is  
on her way out of the door, and she hears that he now has a touch of  
optimism in his voice.]

The text narrates a miniature version of a triangular love drama, reminding us of the fact that laughter often goes hand in hand with lust—and perhaps kills lust, too! Two women and a man enjoy themselves in a second hand goods store, discovering odd items that offer them child-like pleasure. Glass pussycats! A glass eye! These objects serve as metonymic representations of the characters and the erotic emotions that resonate between them. Immodest and impulsive, one of the women buys an entire glass necklace, symbolizing an almost insatiable desire, as if she cannot possess enough of the odd items. The man responds to her behavior by leaning over her and talking with her a long time. The other woman leaves and the man urges her to drive carefully. She notices that he has an optimistic voice, and the reader shares her feeling that love is in the air.

Lunden writes a humorous poem that examines how laughter

both liberates and hints at an eroticized game. The diction of the text is quite neutral, but the emotional states of the characters are made apparent through the various points of view and their expressive language. The glass objects and beads join in a metaphoric function that alludes to sight and observation—"rare ting som berre kan bli rare når tre par auge ser samtidig" [odd things that only become funny when three pairs of eyes see them together]—at the same time they become fetishist objects that absorb and reflect bodily desire. The traditional motif of rivalry in the love triangle appears to be absent, but, of course, that option still exists. Perhaps the man will maneuver the other woman away in order to return to her later. His optimistic voice could for that matter be matched with the anticipatory happiness of a promise of things to come.

The glass pussycats [in Lunden's Norwegian text: the glass hen] are perhaps not quite innocent, either. In another poem, Lunden challenges the reader by stating that not everybody knows the meaning of the word "høne" [hen]:

Der finst skuggar og der finst skuggar som  
aldri vert framkalla

Som f.eks. å reise ein tur ut i provinsen  
og oppdage at ein der ikkje anar  
kva ordet høne betyr (309)

[There are shadows and there are shadows that  
never get developed

Like e.g. taking a trip into the provinces  
to discover that they have no idea  
what the word pussy means]

Once again, the poet reverses our common assumptions. It is exactly in the countryside that we expect people to be familiar with hens. The inversion calls attention to the underlying humor involved in the scenario, where the country inhabitants of course readily recognize a hen,

but not the word *hen*—in Norway a term for female genitalia. Implicit here is the fact that the word—to the less un-knowing—may have additional meanings other than the lexical (which is a bird that lays eggs and cannot fly), and that this other meaning obviously has something to do with the glass *hen* that played such a stimulating role in the play between the shoppers in the previous text. Lunden’s poem presupposes a vulgar ambiguity in a word and a certain signification in the word “*hen*” that the poem alludes to. If anybody is made fun of in this case, it is not the inhabitants of the countryside, but rather us—the readers—who needed their ignorance in order to discover our own.

## High and Low

“Words are a plastic material with which one can do all kinds of things,” Freud states in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*.<sup>68</sup> Lunden takes Freud at his word in the following two poems, which are not directly witty, perhaps, but which play with an implied eroticism in amusing ways. Both poems use a motif taken from the polar wastelands, and belong to the section “Professor Rubeks siste utsikt” [Professor Rubek’s last vintage point]. The first one alludes to Ibsen’s drama *Når vi døde vågner* [*When We Dead Awaken*]:

Professor Rubeks draum var eit skip som gjekk  
heile kysten rundt i ei reise. Ei leppe  
kring Nordishavets kant. Krølla (315)

[Professor Rubek’s dream was a ship that sailed  
round the whole coast on one voyage. A lip  
round the rim of the Arctic ocean. Curled]

In another context, Eldrid Lunden rewrote the drama into a comedy in which she included quotations and characters from Ibsen’s works. The title has been changed from *Når vi døde vågner* to

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<sup>68</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* 34.

*Spøkelsessonate i tre deler* [*A Ghost Sonata in Three Parts*].<sup>69</sup> In the tragedy of the drama, Lunden goes a step further than in the poems in using parody, and the interpolation of today's slogans into Ibsen's high style language produces collisions both harsh and comic. Maja's song of freedom, for instance, is in Lunden's version crude and tasteless, serving as a rather sharp remark aimed to silly girls in contemporary societies: "Jeg er fri, jeg er fri, jeg er fri / min trengsels tid er forbi / Jeg knuller også, og da blir jeg / enda mer fri" [I am free, I am free, I am free / my time of trouble is over / I fuck, too, and then I am / even more free].<sup>70</sup>

Sexual hints are even more evident in the sonata than in the poems: they confirm the previous impression of erotic undertones. In a stage direction full of extravagant descriptions of exotic food and drinks, we hear of "små marsipanfugler med grønne isnebb, og fjærdrakt i frekk leppe-rosa" [small marzipan birds with green icy beaks and a naughty lip-pink plumage] along with "gammeldags ribs med korianderkrydder i pervers vase" [old fashioned redcurrant with coriander in a kinky vase].<sup>71</sup> This is undoubtedly the same impertinent lip that we observe in the poem: "Ei leppe / kring Nordishavets kant. Krølla" [A lip / round the rim of the Arctic ocean. Curled].

The second poem is similar in its cunning combination of eroticism and geography:

Polen som eit brusande kvitt skjørt kring  
magnetnåla  
Å krabbe fram under polkanten ein dag, plutseleg  
som kvitebjørn kong Valemon (316)

[The Pole like a frothy white skirt circling  
the magnetic needle  
Crawling out from under the rim of the pole one day, suddenly  
like the Prince Valemon, the white bear.]

<sup>69</sup> Originally published in Lisbeth P. Wærp, ed., *Livet på likstrå: Henrik Ibsens Når vi døde vågner* [*Life Lied Dead: Henrik Ibsen's When We Dead Awaken*].

<sup>70</sup> Lunden in Wærp 268.

<sup>71</sup> Lunden in Wærp 265.

The poem contains a relatively clear analogy to the cover photograph of *Slik Sett*, where a black fountain pen hovers autonomously over a white, curly cloth or napkin that, by association, evokes a small mountain covered by snow. The background is dark and the pen fails to cast a shadow, thus the picture appears rather sterile and formal.

In contrast to a controlled environment as evident in the photo, the poem lets loose its energies: the skirt is full of ruffling and someone is crawling forward from “under polkanten ein dag, plutseleg” [under the rim of the pole one day, suddenly]. Someone has paid a visit under the skirt. And someone has been out with the white bear. The magnetic needle stands seemingly fixed and without vibrations, but everything that happens around it is excessive, out of control. The myth of the pole as a site of stability is ruptured. The pole is not a localizable point with firm borders, but rather a ruffling skirt. Its edge is not a clearly demarcated line, but rather a place where hidden things suddenly, unexpectedly, turn up. The white bear is—in a psychoanalytically inspired interpretation at least—a friendly, but also frightening animal that stands for the desired male, while the fairytale symbolizes the princess’s struggle to accept her own mature sexuality. In sum, this poem produces a playful game with a pole, a magnet needle, and a bear—seemingly innocuous until we recognize the underlying uncontrollable powers that cause these things to become charged with a sexualized significance.

Lunden’s style very often hovers between sincerity and comedy, and sometimes we can observe how her humor serves to dissolve or negate the gravity of the subject matter. Often Lunden lets the text take an unpredictable and sudden turn that is seemingly meant to loosen up a stern atmosphere. Still, the serious undertone is never completely eradicated, and may even reappear with sharper contours in the light of humor.

Lever noen eit bortkasta liv?

Elskar noen med ein bortkasta kjærleik?

Burde desillusjonane i alle fall ta seg saman  
og bli litt meir presise?

Om det hadde vore han som stod for tur  
ville han bestilt eit nedrykningsspøkelse i full  
størrelse, med vid opne auge, tenkte han (303)

[Does anyone live a wasted life?  
Does anyone love with a wasted love?  
Should disillusionings at least pull themselves together  
and become a little more specific?

If it had been his turn  
he would have ordered a ghost, life size  
to haunt him with disrating,  
with eyes wide open, he thought]

On a first reading, we may think that the sincerity of the poem is presented through the three introductory questions and that the humor is condensed into the single phrase “nedrykningsspøkelse” [ghost of disrating] and its accompanying story. But things are in actuality more complex. The vast and difficult questions are already contaminated by the use of words that break with solemn rhetoric, such as when the word “bortkasta” [wasted, literally “thrown away”] is used in reference to life and love and when the question is asked whether illusions should “ta seg saman” [pull themselves together].

Clearly, Lunden asks existential questions: “Lever noen eit bortkasta liv? / Elskar noen med ein bortkasta kjærleik?” [Does anyone live a wasted life? / Does anyone love with a wasted love?] It should be mentioned that the poem is placed within a section entitled “Deilig, deilig var livet / ved Taunitzer See” [Lovely, lovely was life / by Taunitzer See], which alludes again to *Når vi døde vågner*. The basic problematic of the drama is therefore an important context to Lunden’s work here. As we know, Ibsen’s play depicts a man and artist who reflects on his life with regret and doubt, and a love that was not allowed to develop. It was instead—according to the woman’s perspective—thrown away. Both characters are disillusioned, but the poem asks how seriously we are to take this disillusion. Should they not just pull themselves together and define their



troubles? The word “nedrykningsspøkelse” [ghost of disrating] in the second section originates in sport journalism and indicates the threat to soccer (and other) teams of being knocked out of the top leagues. Lunden inverts the metaphor to a literal meaning, creating several comic effects in the process. Not only is the ghost “bestilt” [ordered], but it also has “vid opne auge” [eyes wide open].

Perhaps there is a possible connection between the two situations, the drama and the sport competition. Rubek and Irene fall from the top of a mountain in an avalanche that echoes the image of other existential falls and setbacks. To be confronted with an ordinary “nedrykningsspøkelse” [ghost of disrating] is in that case a more banal version of their pathos. This man is not a victim of destiny or divine powers; he orders the ghost himself! Maybe Lunden’s concern is to point at the grotesque difference between those themes that occupied Ibsen’s characters, and the trivial concerns surrounding modern existence. The smoldering humor, in the end, does not disconnect itself from the serenity, and the contrast between the dream and the tragic fall—between the fear of a wasted life and the trivial media messages—are so immense that the poem remains hovering in dissonance, flanked by the discrepancies between now and then, between dramatic pathos and popular sport jargon. The humor does not relieve or harmonize this dissonance, but rather strengthens the recognition of the powers of illusion—and the necessity of disillusion.

## Poetry of Parody

I have called this chapter “Parody”; not only because it fits nicely with my other P-titles! In Lunden’s work a tendency to parody is evident all the way from her first volume, up until her latest one so far. Imitations of, and allusions to, other literary works and events, such as readings, achieve a comic effect. Yet, there is also a strong ongoing discussion with theoretical concepts and ideas, which often turns comical. The issues subjected to laughter are multiple, and the same goes for the methods and manners by which parody operates.

This fact inspires me to consider humor as an essential part of the

aesthetics in this poetic universe. On the one hand, humor is a style, a way of loosening up, perhaps of escaping sincerity when things become too serious and difficult. We recognize the burlesque, the bodily effects, as well as the often tremendous distance between high and low. On the other hand, humor supports a poetics, a hermeneutic conviction that opens a gap within language itself, a hiatus that butts against harmonious solutions and permanent truths. There is a strong theoretical and political dialogue in Lunden's texts, but also a tendency to disturb and challenge it by jokes, puns and enigmas.

The comic dimensions of Eldrid Lunden's poetry are ultimately difficult to identify and to interpret. Certainly, it is the very logic of humor itself to shatter any prejudice that we might have of a complete and stable meaning of an artistic utterance, and Lunden's poetry is exactly a kind of discourse that rejects any attempt at confirming conventions by way of conclusive arguments. It is a restless engagement in social phenomena, cultural expressions and intellectual seriousness, where the humor again and again insists on seeing things differently.

## Post Script

The book title, *Dialogues in Poetry*, is on the one hand a concrete and practical indication of the intertwined voices in this project. I have read the poems and tried to offer in-depth and relevant interpretations of some of them as well as of Lunden's entire poetical work. Annabelle Despard has translated the selected poems from Norwegian into English, in itself an interpretative and dialogic undertaking. We have communicated extensively about each other's suggestions and sketches, and also considered the challenges that arise when we try to bridge cultural and linguistic barriers.

On the other hand, the title is an argument in favor of an understanding of Lunden's poetry as a basically dialogical discourse. Contrary to some of the critics, who emphasize the enigmatic aspects of Lunden's way of writing, I have foregrounded the intrinsic communicative energy that in various ways saturates her aesthetic enterprise. Let me conclude by connecting this thesis to the thematic structure of the book, and discuss my point in relation to each topic.

The political dimension in Lunden's work is obvious, but as political art, the poems are not unambiguous and simple expressions of certain values and ideological preferences, or direct descriptions of social injustice. Instead, they discuss implications of policy, such as power, violence, and dominance by means of a performative voice appealing to the reader's own conscience and decision. Also, the feminist engagement is strong; bereft of clichés and over-simplicity, the poems recurrently investigate various historical practices in representations of femininity and female identity. Deeply embedded in this thematic is an appellative intentionality that aims at questioning gender inequality.

Dialogic traits in poetry are closely tied to rhetoric, and typical means of involving the other – the real reader or an implied "you" – are direct addresses, questions, staged discussions, or a kind of talk or chatting as if a listener were present. In her texts on places, Lunden's lyrical I not only talks about, but also *to* buildings, grave-

stones, church furniture, archaeological remnants or fictive persons, thus provoking an animation of dead things. This is most certainly a kind of thinking aloud, or at least a hypothetical communication that aims at openly verbalizing and inviting a discussion of the meanings of places.

A similar feature is observable in the picture poems, where the beholder simply confronts the persons portrayed with her questions and thoughts, or even summarizes a dialogue between them. Visual representations may, moreover, be considered as dialogue partners in the textual genre ekphrasis, which is a more or less free description, interpretation, or discussion with an image. In Lunden's case, the dialogic structure of the ekphrastic poems is usually quite evident, even if the *paragone* effect, which means that the text tends to dominate the visual work, is unavoidable and even defines the genre.

Less obvious is perhaps the dialogic poetics in texts regarding perception and bodily experience. This phenomenological aspect of Lunden's poetry is probably at the same time the most intimate and the most philosophically sophisticated part of her work. Still, I find it useful to think of the transformations between different senses, as in synaesthetic tropes, and between senses, perception, and thought, as a dialogue. Much in the same way as Mikhail Bakhtin defines the novel as a dialogic genre based on a co-presence of different voices,<sup>72</sup> I will suggest that poetry – and definitely Lunden's poetry – is a site where not only different voices but also different ways of perceiving and understanding the world through senses are explored as a dialogic phenomenon.

Finally, the ludic quality in Lunden's texts is of course a mode of expression that requires a listener in order to succeed. Poetic laughter does not occur in a void. But parody also represents a dialogic play with other texts and artistic objects. It therefore supports the overall impression that this poetry is an answer to a call, a response in a situation where someone is spoken to, and a different voice. Lunden's poetry takes part in a mixture of dialogues – intellectual, artistic and popular.

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<sup>72</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*.

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