

From Imitation to Construction: Steps towards Modernization in Nordic Literature

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Abstract In my article I deal with the modernization of Nordic literature in the 20th century and show the reasons why the aesthetic transition from imitation to construction produced completely new forms of literary expression. In order to illuminate the paradigmatic turn I have analysed five Nordic novels, which through the introduction of new literary techniques aim at transcending the visible world and finding access to the complex reality beyond the reach of human perception. As it proves impossible to imitate what you cannot see or hear, the author is dependent on showing the reality behind reality with the help of constructions and models, which serve as door-openers into hidden connections and all things “what link the world in its depths together” or in Goethe’s original text: “was die Welt im Innersten zusammenhält.”

Key words imitation; construction; mirror; lamp; “behind”-concepts; cubism; circum-perspective; original; copy; cross references; ars combinatoria

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In his well-known book *The Mirror and the Lamp*¹ (1971), M. H. Abrams points out that the Aristotelian mimesis was the fundamental principle in art and literature up to the Romantic age. Due to his conception the function of literature consists in the imitation of nature through an act of verbal translation. The signification process is within one language group quite simple and depends on linguistic competence.

If an author wants to move a cow from the meadow to the written context of an artistic expression, he simply makes use of the three characters c-o-w, which is an arbitrary sign without any similarity with the signified animal, but still evokes the image of its appearance in the reader's mind. This is of course a very simple interrelation between sign and meaning, which through the increase of significative signs grows more complex and extends the spectrum of possible understandings.

The development of mimetic models of literature continues through the Middle Ages and reaches a culmination during the Renaissance and the times of French classicism and German classicism where mimesis means the imitation of the antique patterns of artistic presentation. Common to all forms of literary mimesis is that their topics are taken from the real world of the antique polis, interspersed with accounts about warfare, heroic deeds and antique mythology. The parallel to empirical philosophy is obvious: there is nothing in the mimetic text which has not been prior in the reality beyond the text. Accordingly the mimetic text has its roots in an extended reality, which includes both society and nature, the *res publica* and what Descartes called *res extensa*, the expanded "things" or nature. The artistic procedure presupposes that the author transfers an already existing "thing" or "res" into a new written medium, where it coexists with other "things" in a rearranged artistic landscape, where it can take on new significance.

The Romantic turn around 1800 triggers a complete conversion of the creating impulses, which from now on come from the inside world or from what Descartes calls *res cogitans*. Abram's symbol for this turn is the lamp, which is now throwing new light from the inside world on the "things" outside. According to this reversed stimulation of artistic creativity the "things" do not exist independently of the creator's state of mind. New forms of narrativity occur, influenced by the reinforced interest in "things" beyond rational reach. Parts of Romantic literature developed technics through which these unknown fields of human experience could be visited. It is a matter of illuminating the night and all "things" hidden behind the darkness and of discovering what is called the *terra incognita* or the unknown earth/land, which is very much the same as transcending the borders of empirical knowledge and come into touch with the occult.

Such projects force the author to leave behind all realistic concepts and to consider that the word art, Latin *ars*, is designing something that is not natural, but something artificial. In most of the Germanic languages the designation is Kunst/kunst, which is derived from the verb can/können/kunne and links literary activities to craftsmanship. It is symptomatic that during the Romantic age many authors had a predilection for writing about artificial human beings like Homunculus

in Goethe's *Faust* or Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. This turn from copy to construction paves the way for future literary conceptions which are occupied with finding the reality behind the reality; inspired by *the* inventions of scope-instruments like the telescope, the rectoscope and X-rays it is possible to prolong the reach of the human eye into inside and outside areas thus enabling insight into a hidden world inaccessible to natural perception.

In the following I want to draw attention to five Nordic novels, which in an original manner draft new conceptions of representing "things" hidden in darkness and concealed behind our perceptive accessibility.

1. Hagar Olsson: *På Kanaanexpressen* (In the Kanaan Express Train)

One year after the publication of André Breton's novel *Nadja* the Finnish author Hagar Olsson published her novel *In the Kanaan Express Train* (1929), a caleidoscopic composition, which "Knut Brynhildsvoll has called a photonovel." (Holmström 105) Both novels are remarkable because they include photos in the running text. In her novel Hagar Olsson describes a couple of young people's journey in the night train express between Åbo (Turku) and Helsingfors (Helsinki). The visual text consists of 14 photos, mainly of female faces and motifs from the technical acquisitions of modern life.² Among the photos there is a painting of the French cubist painter Marie Laurencin, visualizing a woman locked up in a bird cage. It is however striking that the photos are negatives. This may seem peculiar, but the author's idea is to establish a special interrelation between the verbal and the visual text. During the eastbound journey through the night the text serves as an instrument in the process of exposing the photos, releasing them from their imprisonment in a negative world of shadows and turning them into the bright light of a promising tomorrow. Thus the novel has clear political intentions. The group of young people travelling through the night want to leave behind them the negative experiences of the Western civilisation heading for a political dawn located in the eastern areas of communist renewal.

This emancipation idea was wide-spread in the 1920s. In Norway a group of left-wing intellectuals founded a society called *Mot dag* (Towards dawn), a branch of the world wide Clarté- movement that attracted many writers, among them the Swedish author Karin Boye, who in the last verse of her poem *I rörelse* (*In motion*) writes:

Bryt upp, bryt upp! Den nya dagen gryr,
Oändligt är vårt stora eventyr.

Set out, set out! The new day is coming up,
Endless is our great adventure.³ (Boye 27)

The idea of a long night's journey into day is old. In the old Norse poem *Bjarkamál* the first line is: "Dagr er upp kominn" (The day has come) and a very popular song by the Norwegian poet Alf Prøysen provides comfort to those who have wasted their time: "Du ska få en dag I mårå, som ny og ubrukt er" (You shall get a day tomorrow that new and untouched is). The idea of a red dawn is rooted in socialist and Marxist doctrines. Hagar Olsson's original idea of applying this communist vision through the cooperation of two genres is exceptional.

However optimistic her double-coded text may be, it belongs at any rate to a number of Nordic novels which on a high artistic level tests new possibilities of passing through the darkness in order to catch a glimpse of the upcoming day. One of the pioneers of the "behind"- conception of artistic writing is August Strindberg. In a significant scene of his drama *A Dream Play* the deans of the university faculties are sitting in front of a closed door discussing what may hide behind it. When finally the door is opened it turns out there is nothing behind it. However, this nihilistic approach doesn't discourage future writers and keep them away from further dealing with the problems of behind.

2. Svend Åge Madsen: *Dage med Diam eller livet om natten (Days with Diam or Night Life)*

In discussions about the relations between history and literature you occasionally find a reference to Aristotle who asserts that history is what has happened, literature what may happen. This statement leads further to a topical discussion about possible or parallel lives, some of which are taking place in dreams, in the imagination or under the influence of drugs. Albrecht Schöne, one of the leading experts in the field of German literary research, has dealt with this topic in a noteworthy article about Robert Musil's novel *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (*The Man Without Qualities*). In his essay he introduces the term "Möglichkeitssinn" (sense of possibility) and examines the verbal form *subjunctive potentialis* in Musil's novel⁴ (Schöne 1969). This is a modal category of the verb which helps the writer to keep the world open towards its not realised, alternative possibilities. Thus the *subjunctive potentialis* is a mode of expression that underlines the infinity of possibilities and the incomplete state of the world. The demand for supplementary access to the hidden worlds behind the visible ones makes the reader more attentive to the fact that "things" could have been realised in innumerable deviations of the

chosen possibilities.

In his novel Svend Åge Madsen draws the consequences of the subjunctive character of human life and arranges a fictional setting, in which real life is accompanied with the shadows of unrealised possibilities. The author's intention is to write a novel according to the principles of cubist art:

One knows the technic of painters who disagreed with depicting their models either from the *front* (en face) or the *aside* (in profile) perspective and instead of the conventional models of presentation preferred a model, which enabled them to integrate both of the perspectives in one and the same motif. This book makes use of a technic which can be considered to be the corresponding literary principle. (185)

In order to get a complete impression of his protagonist and his relations to Diam it is necessary not only to describe his chosen way through the model system, but also the omitted choices, which of course are infinite. The metatextual statement of the narrator himself expresses a conviction that life is much too complicated that it can be justified as being an additional string of events. He refuses the additive narration and states that "my life written continually is of no aesthetical value"(47). The contents of the consciousness are involved in a ceaseless process of transformations, and in keeping with this fact it is decisive to find a model which is able to represent the nature of the designated narrative object in a suitable way. Madsen explains his point of departure with the following observation, according to which the presentation of a human being on the plain page of paper and in the form of "a long line", which links together the figures and the events to a novel, is just as little satisfactory as a map that has no similarity with the globular form of the earth, which in a more proper way is representable in the shape of a globe.

In the eyes of the author the constantly ongoing accumulation of experience is the dominant manifestation of the human mind. Hence he recognizes that the mental structure is organized after the model of a pyramid. This triangular model takes the three-dimensional structure of cubist presentation into account, but it fails to visualize the multiperspective appearance in a simultaneous sketch. The application of the cubist idea requires a deconstruction of regular rectangular or acute-angled figures and a decomposition of linear models into twisted figures comparable to Pablo Picasso's painting *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, which shows the five prostitutes in a circum-perspective.

In his novel Madsen simulates this technique through an action starting on

the top of the pyramid, where the main person's intention is to glide down the pyramid's sides at the same time, which of course is impossible. The idea of the novel is, however, to illustrate the invisible side of the pyramid through the art of generating the story. The main person Alian Sandme is involved in a self-exploring experiment which serves to enable him to find the alian (alien) part of himself, exposed in the anagrammatical form of his first name. Moving downstairs from one position to the next he is bound to descend according to a system of binary oppositions. He starts at point S on the top of the pyramid, from which he descends to point SA or ST and in continuation of the ramifying process to further points on the sides of the pyramidal construction. However, this binary locomotion through the system does not satisfy the ambitions of Alian Sandme. As a fictional figure he also wants to occupy the positions that he on his binary way through the system has left unoccupied. Thus the unrealised movements simply do not get lost, but are preserved and at any time at the protagonist's disposal as the subjects of dreams and imaginations. The space between the single choices is not empty, but full of undeveloped possibilities, which accompanies him as the shadows of unlived life. During Alian Sandme's night life these unlived possibilities take possession of him and expose him to his "hidden" life. This is part of the cubist intention to make the story of his life more complete.

In this complex texture the female figure of Diam plays an important role in Alian Sandme's world. The meetings with her takes place in his real and imagined life. Her anagrammatical name tells us that she is a constructed person; Diam read backwards spells "made", but at the same time she is also a young woman, a "maid", who is subject to Alian Sandme's voyeuristic curiosity, and that is why he completes her appearance with features extracted from a cubist circumspection of her appearance:

Have I only misused Diam? I have sucked impressions from her, I have drawn experiences out of her. I have placed her on a platform, have went around her in order to satisfy my sense of beauty (...), I have turned her face around in order to find the most beautiful positions, to see her from the most attractive perspectives. (151)

While he is collecting and combining single perceptions to a complete view on Diam, he projects himself into an equivalent number of piquant, poetical and amusing relations to her. In doing so all his mental energies participate in producing innumerable new embodiments of himself and of Diam:

It remains always strange to me that I am sitting here in the middle of a net, with copies of myself on all sides, ahead of me and behind me, all of which I didn't have the slightest notion of. (27)

According to this model the I is an unlimited, constantly expanding totality, which consists of partial entities with hidden capacities of establishing internal connections. The attempt to spatialize the stream of consciousness-concept according to the pyramid model challenges the author's ability to tie together the hidden dimensions of his substratum with those accessible to perception in a way that evokes a complete presentation. This requires the author to be able to rebuild the triangular spatial form of the model on the plain level of a book page, thus ensuring that the hidden sides of the pyramidal consciousness in its function as a reservoir of possibilities become recognizable.

The Danish poet Benny Andersen has expressed the inexhaustibility of the vertical descent in the following verse:

Målt på langs er livet kort
men lodret målt uendeligt. ⁵ (7)
Measured longitudinally life is short
but measured vertically infinite

This is evidently a lyrical adjustment of Roman Jakobson's theory of the poetical function of language, in which he distinguishes between two axes, the syntagmatic or the combination axis and the paradigmatic or the selection axis. In the poetical use of language materials the author selects from a repertory of kindred semantic, phonetic and rhythmic expressions and exchangable language elements, which he, according to the narrative intention, projects onto the combination axis in order to realize what is called the aesthetic difference. The theoretical inexhaustibility of the vertical paradigm is evident. In the case of Alian Sandme one recognizes how he through metaphoric transitions and mental movements places himself in constantly new configurations to Diam, comparable to P.D. A. Atterbom's Astolf, to whom his lover Felicia appears in innumerable personifications:

Men vart jag går, av stjärnor, blommor, droppar,
meg *hon*, blot *hon* i tusen bilder skänks. ⁶ (250)
Wherever I walk, from the stars, the flowers, the drops

she *alone*, she *alone* in thousand pictures is reflected.

Diam's changeableness confirms that *la donna e mobile*. On the one hand she is Diam, on the other hand she is her dia-metrically opposed sisters (housewife or whore); she is further dia-lectically related to her absent roles and always connected with her dia-chronic appearances.

3. Jan Kjærstad: *Speil (Mirrors)*

Jan Kjærstad belongs to the top ten of contemporary Scandinavian authors. In his complex novels he responds to postmodern notions, due to which artistic originality is impossible. He opposes the idea that because everything is said the only choice is to say it in an other way, hereby using the traditional methods of writing in an ongoing process of rearrangements. The postmodern play with tradition cannot satisfy the ambitions of Kjærstad who declares that writing does not consist in copying postmodernity, but in finding new ways of transcending it. In Kjærstad's opinion there is no reason to resign and repeat the point zero situation of postwar literature. History has shown that literature had a future even after Samuel Becket's *Fin de partie*, and according to Kjærstad there is no reason to suppose that postmodernity marks the end of literary renewal. On the contrary, the fast growing information society demands new forms of aesthetical mediation.

In his novel *Speil (Mirrors)* Kjærstad refers to cubist art, which he in an essay from 1982 characterizes as one of the most stimulating forms of art expression in our time. If one considers the analytical form of cubist art as a style which aims at imagining all possible perspectives of an object or an action simultaneously in an act of visual penetration, it is obvious that in his novel Kjærstad is applying cubist principles, certainly without violating his presentation through linguistic deformation or distortion of syntactical connections. Rather, he attempts to retain traditional patterns of narration, and through the combining of conventional epic procedures he tries to achieve a versatile access to his motifs. In his narrative application of cubist art he connects heterogeneous epic genres, among them myth, legend, fairytale, diary, epistle, essay, interview, report, letter, historiography, documentation, autobiography, itinerary with changing narrative methods of representation like style indirecte libre, stream of consciousness, dialogue etc. Kjærstad's aspiration is to establish a cubist-analogous structure without destroying the intact morphological and syntactical system of the language, only through the combination of genres and change of perspectives.

The novel consists of 20 chapters, each of which tells the same story in

slightly varied forms. The general theme is the relation between war and peace, aggression and tranquility observed in the horizon of the 20th century. The title of the novel is not referring to pre-modern forms of mimetic representation. The plots of the single chapters on the contrary mirror each other reciprocally and reflect the main topic of the novel in multiple refractions which aim at mediating a complete impression of historical interrelations. The poetics of combination is a great challenge to the reader, who by entering into the mirror cabinet of the text risks losing his orientation, but by creative reading proceeds to the role of a co-creator of textual meaning. Consequently the primary task of a contemporary work of art is to unveil the hidden structures of individual and social history, and this is in Kjærstad's opinion only possible through the construction of the narrative plot, which is the only way "to discover and describe this structure which is abstract and invisible" (463). This invisible world becomes visible through the changing arrangement of mirrors in the single chapters of the novel, which afford insight into the complexity of the reflected "behind." This implies that the contemporary artist, if he wants to grasp reality and open a window to the "behind"-world, is dependent on constructions that visualize the invisible structures of the hidden, translinguistic world. This is quite in accordance with Hegel's notion that art is a product of the human mind, not a double or a copy of an already existing nature⁷ (16-58). In the post-Hegelian era the designation for such an object is an *artifactual*, a word consisting of the Latin components *ars* (= art) and *facere* (=make), which underlines the fact that art is something made in an artificial way, a construction like Svend Åge Madsen's maid Diam or Jan Kjærstad's mirror model of the 20th century.

4. Jan Kjærstad: *Rand (Verge)*

Jan Kjærstad's novel *Rand (Verge)* appeared in 1990, one hundred years after the Nobel prize winner Knut Hamsun's novel *Sult (Hunger)*, and there are reasons to believe that it is an attempt to rewrite that novel, which is considered to be one of the most influential works of early modern writing. The titles, consisting of respectively four characters, refer semantically to extreme existential concerns, where the main characters move on the verge of ruin. The protagonists are in both of the novels driven by "hunger", where the hunger functions as a stimulus in a creative struggle for meaning. While Hamsun's protagonist in vain fights the hunger with writing projects which again and again collapse and leave him in a state of unsatisfied and unsatisfying hunger, one hundred years after that Kjærstad's protagonist suffers from a situation where meaning to a certain degree is blocked by an abundance of information or narrow specialized knowledge. Whereas

Hamsun's protagonist during the exhaustive semantic process is brought to the verge of self-abandonment, Kjærstad's protagonist is always in search of extreme verge-experiences in the course of universal semantic expansion processes. When he, as a PC-expert of the criminal investigation police in Oslo, walks through the streets in Oslo and apparently unmotivated kills six accidental people, he perceives the murders as stimuli in a process of cognitive accumulation.

The experienced Kjærstad-reader recognizes the structural pattern in other of his novels. He hereby simulates the narration structure of specific genres, in *Verge* the technique and the thrill-packed contents of the criminal novel, while he at the same time deconstructs the underlying genre conventions, which not primarily serve to discover a perpetrator, but to test new connections and open the world towards the unknown or what he calls "the other" or the "totally other." This textual transformation procedure is akin to Hamsun's in *Hunger*, where a realistic depiction of the misery of hunger is derailed and changed into an allegorical story about exhaustion and lack of meaning during the narrative.

It is symptomatic of Kjærstad's authorship that he wants to extend the borders of perception and develop poetical techniques which serve to expand the world and get insight into a behind-scenery not directly perceptible to the senses. For this purpose he develops a poetics of combination or an *ars combinatoria*. In this poetical system the main person is not a real murderer, but a sort of master constructor, who displays his actions in computer animations. That means he is in one and the same person the inventor and executer of the criminal cases and the one who investigates them. Through annexing his victim's biographies Kjærstad's protagonist is able to dispose of their posthumous lives and put them into superior connections, whereby the excellent abilities of the single persons are combined among one another in a way that the victims permanently rise from the dead in new mixtures.

The novel consists of six linear partial-texts, all of which are dealing with the victims biographies with focus on their professions, hobbies, attitudes, taste preferences, preferred ways of communication etc. All the information is readable in vertical or diagonal combinations, which constitutes a textual field or a spatial room, within which hide a nearly inexhaustible number of receptive readings. This montage of ingenious neighbourhoods is a literary counterpart to the cubist collage which integrates heterogenous materials in a complex linguistic construction. From a structural point of view text montages belong to the paradigmatic axis of language expression, where single verbal elements coexist in various permutations and consequently trigger replacements and substitutions

The six criminal stories in Kjærstad's novel constitute with regard to the aesthetics of production complete syntagmatic series, which receptionally remain open for innumerable paradigmatic relations. In such an open system the narrative elements have no prescribed position in the epic entirety. They are mobile elements in a spatial epic web where it is up to the reader to contextualize them according to his best understanding. Considering the complexity of literary constructions like Kjærstad's, Peter Bürger underlines that regroupings of epic elements is not only imaginable, but rather a necessary part of the reception process. It is inherent in the paradigmatic model that it refuses a final solution and shrinks from all forms of synthetic reconciliation. Bürger states: "Whereas the syntagmatic structural model, the sentence, however long it may be, has an end, the series are on principle infinite" ⁸ (107).

Kjærstad founds this overlapping epic system on a matrix theory. He reminds the reader that matrix means mother and womb as well. At the bottom of this subtly constructed system there is the idea that the reader under the guidance of the narrator will be able to liberate the single human being from his imprisonment in isolated existential parcels and hereby discover a creature who bears the feature of man, in his dimensions a greater human being, who is able to operate the whole register of possibilities in a creative way. It is striking that Kjærstad introduces a main person who investigates the murders he himself has committed while he at the same time combines the solutions of the criminal cases with a revival of the victims. Each of the killed persons are in civil life leading experts in their respective professions, well known among people of the same occupation, but less known by the public. It is the investigator's idea to change this situation. Through killing them and connecting their lives with those of the other victims he wants to remove them from their daily anonymity and give them eternal life in the literary text where they according to the readers skill in constructing interpersonal webs grow into more complete human beings.

5. Torgny Lindgren: *Till sanningens lov (Praising the Truth/To the Honor of Truth)*

Torgny Lindgren belongs to the leading authors of contemporary Swedish literature. Due to his status among Swedish writers he was elected member of *de aderton* in 1991, a group of 18 intellectuals, who as members of The Swedish Academy decide on the awarding of the Nobel price of literature. The title of his satiric novel alludes to Johan Sebastian Bach's cantata of the same name. In his novel he deals in a very amusing way with problems concerning the relation between original and

copy, linking up to Walter Benjamin's discussion regarding the question what an original work of art is in times of its technical reproduction.⁹ (1980) According to the Aristotelian concept mimesis is the imitation of nature and the outside world perceived with the human senses. In Lindgren's novel the relation between "thing" and "copy" has changed. The subject of art is not "things" or "nature", but art itself. Lindgren illustrates this fundamental change through a series of portrait-stories, in which the decline of an original work of art is the main topic. The protagonist of his novel is a framemaker and art salesman in the Swedish provinces, who by accident at a public auction buys an oil-painting, which later on is considered to be an unknown work by the Swedish painter Nils Dardel and identified as a masterpiece of contemporary Swedish art.

The original claim of this painting is however questioned when a second version of it turns up. After the theft of the aquired painting the protagonist accepts an invitation to visit a friend of his in Stockholm, who promises to indemnify him from his loss. At his arrival he is surprised to find masterpieces of modern European art on all walls of the flat. It turns out that he has not entered the flat of an unknown collector, but the studio of an ingenious falsifier, who maintains that all his paintings are originals. The inversion of the relation between original/copy, genuine/ false, true/wrong is explainable in the following syllogism, which I made in order to visualize the peculiar logic of the satiric discourse:

- A: All my paintings are falsifications
- B: The genuine expression of our time is the false
- C: Ergo – all my paintings are originals

The falsifier's version of the original painting is perfect and is not distinguishable from the original version. It is merely a doubling or a repetition. According to the faking intention the result is achieved when the adjustment of the two art objects has reached the level of absolute similarity. Under this condition only a spectral analysis of the colors can solve the problem of the temporal succession of the two "originals."

In the course of the narrative the status of the original painting is doubted. The alleged painting of the *Madonna* is not registered in the list of Dardel's works. Consequently it is either an unknown work or a work attributed to him because of certain style criteria. There are, however, reasons to suspect that Dardel's *Madonna* is not an original painting, but a work by an unknown artist, who has faked his way of painting and thus given rise to the supposition that it is a genuine work by

Dardel. And so the reader from the very beginning calls in question whether an original exists at all or not. This is part of Lindgren's satiric intention. In his satiric discourse about the decline of truth and originality he gives the reader reason to question if there on the whole exists an original or rather merely faked originals.

Lindgren lets the reader remain in the dark about the real status of the aquired painting. It belongs to the concept of his novel that it sheds light on questions concerning the Platonic distinction between prototype (Urbild) and copy (Abbild) as well. If Lindgren had been in need of an undoubted original of a *Madonna*, he easily could have used one of Edvard Munch's five *Madonna*-paintings, all of which may be considered originals because they are variations of the same motif with trifling deflexions. Apparently Lindgren wants to leave the question of originality open in order to keep the reader in uncertainty about the origin of the aquired painting.

The only thing we know for sure is that the falsifier's *Madonna*, *Madonna number 2*, is inspired by an already existing painting. Art no longer means imitating what God has created, but what the painter as the second creator has produced. The relation between art/literature and reality/nature has been inverted owing to the fact that the artist observes nature/reality not directly, but through the spectacles of art. As the art historian E. H. Gombrich once stated nobody has "an innocent eye"; the eyes are infected with everything they have ever seen, and in our time art experiences tend to overshadow reality and blur the border between real and artistic perception. The most famous expression of this shifting perspective in modern Swedish poetry one find in Göran Palm's poem *The sea*, in which art experience amount to the world constituting principle:

Jag står framför havet.	I stand in front of the sea.
Där är det.	There it is.
Där är havet.	There is the sea.
Jag tittar på det.	I look at it.
Havet. Jaha.	The sea. Indeed.
Det är som på Louvren.	It is like in Louvre. ¹⁰ (1964)

Because of the transformation of the image into reality, reality not only disappears; reality also turns into an image through a process of reversal. As a result of this inversion the ontological status of image and reality is rattled. On the one hand, the loss of reality is lamented; on the other hand, there is a sadness in the world because images and illusions have replaced reality and given rise to a situation

where art does not imitate reality, but reality imitates art. The following sequence from Lindgren's novel may illuminate this reversal: The framemaker, looking out of his window on the last snow of the year comments on this visual act with the words: "The snow looked like it used to look on paintings in the price-level between 400-600 crowns. It could have been a painting of Ström." (123) This is the name of the most selling trivial painter in Sweden, whose works include landscape motifs and the widespread decorative motif *Deer at Sunset*.

The painted *Madonnas* share a common destiny. They are locked up in frames behind glasses, which expose them to the glance of voyeurs, who enjoy what Walter Benjamin calls their exhibition value (*Ausstellungswert*). In the course of narration the *Madonna* escapes her frame existence and with the help of a promotor succeed in establishing a carrière in show business, where she proceeds from a juvenile pop-singer to a local copy of the American popstar Madonna. This marks a low-level in the decline of a genuine Madonna.

As a star in show business the Madonna is omnipresent in the public media, where she appears in innumerable copies or doubles of herself. Compared to Edvard Munch's *Madonna* it is evident what Lindgren's *Pop-Madonna* has lost. She has no *aura* any more, and according to Benjamin the *aura* is the coronal veil around the painted figure, which links it to the matrix of the image and gives it the authenticity of an original painting.

When the framemaker and the *Pop-Madonna* finally try to escape the inauthentic world of post-modern reproductions and the spiritual atmosphere of cultural resignation, they fail to enter into a copyfree zone and to find a place uninfluenced by the lack of originality. The novel's last picture seems in this respect to be informative. By their relocation they settle down in a landscape equal to those of the previously mentioned trivial artist Ström, who through his art understanding connects to the doubling techniques of realistic painting most popular a century before of Ström's time. Thus, at the end of the novel the two protagonists are ironically in the picture again, framed by the same Swedish nature they have grown up in, far away from the cultural expressions of modern urban life. The satiric concept of Lindgren's novel shows that it is impossible to fight semantic stagnation through postmodern recycling of artistic patterns and paradigms, not to mention through withdrawal into the trashy surroundings of a world lost and gone forever.

Lindgren's novel is important because it shows the desperate need for the reappearance of a world behind the copies. The other novels dealt with in this article focus on the "hidden" reality beyond the reach of sensual perception. In

order to realize their intentions the authors are forced to give up all imitation concepts of writing in preference of constructions and models through which the writer is able to transcend reality and make the world “behind” accessible to himself and the reader.

Notes

1. Abrams, M. A. *The Mirror and the Lamp. Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*(Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1971).
2. “Fotoroman har Knut Brynhildsvoll träffande kallet den kalejdoskopiska kompositionen” (Knut Brynhildsvoll has called this calejdoscopical composition a photonovel), Roger Holmström “Modernisternas prosa”, in: Clas Zilliacus (ed.) *Finlands svenska litteraturhistoria* (andra delen: 1900-talet, Atlantis förlag, Stockholm 2000): 105.
3. Refer to Karin Boye’s “I rörelse” in *Härdarne* (Stockholm, 1927). All translations from the Nordic languages are the author’s own.
4. Albrecht Schöne’s “Zum Gebrauch des Konjunktivs bei Robert Musil” in *Euphorion, Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte*, 79, vol.55, Stuttgart 1961.
5. Benny Andersen’s *Personlige papirer. Digte* (Copenhagen: Borgen Forlag Gyldendal forlag, 1974) 7.
6. Atterbom, P.D.A., *Lycksalighetens ö. Valda skrifter*, vol.1, Ed. Fredrik Böök(Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 1927) 250.
7. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, Werkausgabe vol.13(Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970) 16-58.
8. Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde*(Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974) 107.
9. Walter Benjamin’s “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, Ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980).
10. Göran Palm, “Havet” *Världen ser dig* (Stockholm: Norstedts Förlag, 1964).

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