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Catastrophes of Redemption: Modernism and Fascism in Norway

By

Dean N. Krouk

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of

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Scandinavian

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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Mark Sandberg, Chair

Professor Linda Rugg

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Professor Dorothy Hale

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Abstract

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This study examines selections from the work of three modernist writers who also supported Norwegian fascism and the Nazi occupation of Norway: Knut Hamsun (1859-1952), winner of the 1920 Nobel Prize; Rolf Jacobsen (1907-1994), Norway's major modernist poet; and Åsmund Sveen (1910-1963), a fascinating but forgotten expressionist figure. In literary studies, the connection between fascism and modernism is often associated with writers such as Ezra Pound or Filippo Marinetti. I look to a new national context and some less familiar figures to think through this international issue. Employing critical models from both literary and historical scholarship in modernist and fascist studies, I examine the unique and troubling intersection of aesthetics and politics presented by each figure.

After establishing a conceptual framework in the first chapter, "Unsettling Modernity," I devote a separate chapter to each author. Analyzing both literary publications and lesser-known documents, I describe how Hamsun's early modernist fiction carnivalizes literary realism and bourgeois liberalism; how Sveen's mystical and queer erotic vitalism overlapped with aspects of fascist discourse; and how Jacobsen imagined fascism as way to overcome modernity's culture of nihilism. In various ways, I argue, the intellectual orientation that motivates their turn to fascist utopianism also lies behind their modernist urge to create new anti-bourgeois and anti-realist forms of artistic expression.

Each case shows a transition from an aesthetic form of anti-rationalism or anti-nihilism to political form of renewal – a shift from a literary encounter with modernity's scene of chaos and reduction to an ideological fantasy of redemption via fascism. As we know, the sort of redemption that Hamsun, Sveen, and Jacobsen imagined to be embodied in European fascism turned out catastrophically – for their own postwar lives and compromised legacies, but more importantly for the millions of people they never knew who died in the Nazi genocide.

To my parents, to Leah, and to Allen

Table of Contents

Dedication	i
Acknowledgements	iii
1. Unsettling Modernity: Intersections of Literary Modernism and Fascist Ideology	1
2. Reactionary Radicalism and Anti-Realism in Knut Hamsun's <i>Mysterier</i>	21
3. Åsmund Sveen's Rite of Spring: Erotic Vitalism and Fascism	52
4. Rolf Jacobsen's Ragnarok: Modernism, Anti-Nihilism, and Redemptive Politics	80
Conclusion: Specters of Nihilism, Catastrophes of Redemption	110
Works Cited	114

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Chapter One

Unsettling Modernity: Intersections of Literary Modernism and Fascist Ideology

“We know from experience that the claim to escape from the system of contemporary reality so as to produce the overall programs of another society, of another way of thinking, another culture, another vision of the world, has led only to the return of the most dangerous traditions. I prefer the very specific transformations that have proved to be possible ... to the programs for a new man that the worst political systems have repeated throughout the twentieth century.”

- Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”

Prologue

In 1943, a propaganda volume about Norwegian fascist writers called *Nasjonalsosialister i norsk diktning* (National Socialists in Norwegian Literature) was published in Nazi-occupied Norway. The book was based on a lecture series that was broadcast on Norwegian radio in the winter of 1942-1943. To herald this publication, the newspaper then edited by Rolf Jacobsen, *Glåmdalen*, printed the book’s cover, a photographic collage of the faces of the writers discussed in the lectures.¹ Among others, one can see here the faces of Knut Hamsun (1859-1952), Åsmund Sveen (1910-1963), and Rolf Jacobsen himself (1907-1994), the three authors whose modernist literature and fascist sympathies are examined in this dissertation. While these authorships vary in terms of style, genre, and renown, each writer was an important Norwegian literary modernist, and each was tried and sentenced for treason after World War II for his role as a collaborator, which included the publication of pro-Nazi journalism and cultural propaganda. Although Hamsun was never officially a member of *Nasjonal Samling*, the small fascist party in Norway, this is merely a technicality; he published a series of pro-Nazi articles during the war, including an infamous obituary for Hitler, and his longstanding sympathies for European fascism are well documented. Jacobsen joined the party in 1940 and edited a Nazi-coordinated local newspaper, in which he signed his name to many compromising editorials during the war. Sveen was also a member of *Nasjonal Samling* and one of the party’s prominent cultural figures; among other things, he edited the National Socialist literary canon.

In what ways were their literary works connected to their political decisions? What was it about artistic modernism in Norway, or in Europe more generally, that led certain writers and artists to become complicit in the crimes of fascism? And what was it about fascist ideology that produced such a strong sense of attraction and recognition for these figures? The aim of the present chapter is to develop a conceptual framework in which such questions can be addressed at both a general, theoretical level and at the level of the particular case, with its many wrinkles, complications, and variations. Hamsun, Jacobsen, and Sveen offer three distinct but mutually revealing cases through which to investigate the complex political ramifications of modernism in Norwegian literature and internationally. The overall purpose of this study is to examine how these authors expressed discontent with liberal European modernity, which they perceived as overly

¹ *Glåmdalen*, November 24, 1943.

rationalized, degenerate, or nihilistic, and to explain how and why fascism appealed to them as a utopian and redemptive remedy.

Rewinding history about a decade from *Nasjonalsosialister i norsk diktning*, to 1933, when Hitler was appointed chancellor in Germany (January) and Vidkun Quisling formed the *Nasjonal Samling* party (May), we find each writer at a significant point in his career. Rolf Jacobsen, then in his late twenties, published *Jord og Jern* (Earth and Iron), a collection that is still considered a pioneering work of poetic modernism in Norway. In the early thirties, Jacobsen was involved with the communist organization *Mot Dag* (Toward Day), as well as other culturally and politically leftist organizations. In the fall of 1934, he traveled to Berlin with a friend who was entering a pro-forma marriage to a German Jewish woman to help her escape the regime. Like many other Scandinavian artists and writers, Jacobsen was captivated by this metropolitan cultural and industrial center. He rushed around Berlin's streets and subways, visited cinemas that showed Nazi propaganda films, and witnessed the spectacle of uniformed men marching on Unter den Linden. One day, Jacobsen glimpsed Hitler emerging from a car; at another point he caught sight of Goebbels high on a platform above the crowds (Røsbak 109). After this taste of Hitler's Reich – which did not convert him to National Socialism – Jacobsen returned to Norway; the following year he published a rather pessimistic and alienated collection of urban poetry called *Vrimmel* (Swarm, 1935). He remained engaged in leftist political activity – he was to all appearances anti-capitalist, anti-fascist, and pacifistic – for the rest of the thirties. Then, in an abrupt political about-face, Jacobsen joined *Nasjonal Samling* and became the editor of a fascist newspaper during the war – a move that might be seen as expedient and opportunistic, but was based in a genuine desire for political salvation. After serving his sentence for treason and struggling for many postwar years, Jacobsen eventually became one of his country's most acclaimed and widely translated writers.

Åsmund Sveen was still in his early twenties when Hitler came to power, yet he had already published an acclaimed work of expressionistic and (homo)erotic poetry, *Andletet* (The Face, 1931), and he was completing a second volume for publication that year. Sveen, like Jacobsen, gave no indication of any serious support for Hitler's Germany until later in the decade; he identified as a pacifist and wrote as a critic for the leftist *Dagbladet* while developing his peculiar brand of vitalist mysticism. He too visited Nazi Germany in 1934, a few months before Jacobsen's visit, as a sort of literary ambassador at the *Deutsch-Nordisches Schriftstellerhaus* in the Baltic seaside resort of Travemünde. Although he insisted at the time that he was no National Socialist, Sveen also wrote that he was beginning to understand “the new mentality” and to acquire greater insight into what the young Nazis really thought (Gatland 93). After returning from Germany in the fall of 1934, Sveen submitted the manuscript of an experimental novel about homosexual life, *Vinduet og vaaren* (The Window and the Spring). However, the consultant at his publisher, Sigurd Hoel – an important novelist and cultural-radical voice in mid-century Norway – deemed the novel too decadent, worse than “the most artificial 1890s romanticism” (96). (It has never been published and the manuscript has been lost.) Although Sveen published additional collections of poetry before and after the war, some of them bizarrely fascinating, he was never rehabilitated in the eyes of the postwar public, and his work has only recently gathered new attention in Norway.

In October 1933, the 74-year-old Hamsun, having already cycled through many triumphs, fiascos, and comebacks in his long, erratic career, published the third volume (*Men Livet Lever*) in a popular realist trilogy about the charismatic and charlatanic vagabond August. Earlier that year, in a letter to his publisher Harald Grieg, a Jewish friend who would later be sent to a concentration camp by the regime Hamsun extolled, he voiced some of his first private applause for fascism: “Mussolini skulle jeg nok hat lyst til å nedlægge min høie beundring og dype ærbødighet for – Gud nåde os for en kar midt i vår forvirrede tid!” (“I would like to express my great admiration and deep respect for Mussolini – my God, what a guy in this confused age!”) (*Erobreren* 122). The Nobel laureate’s first public defense of Nazism would come the next year, in a feud with the literature professor Johan Fredrik Paasche in *Aftenposten*. Paasche advised the public to think twice about any sympathies they might have for the Norwegian fascist party and to learn from the current climate of political repression in Germany. (Concentration camps for political dissenters were already in full swing at this time.) Hamsun’s response was that such repression was the necessary price to pay for the “ethical transformation” of an entire society; he mocked Paasche for wanting to return to the pre-Nazi Germany of the Weimar Republic, “when the communists, the Jews, and [Heinrich] Brüning ruled in this Nordic country” (137). At many points in the next decade, the elderly Hamsun would not miss an opportunity to proclaim his approval for his Germanic brethren in the new Reich, whose conquest over England he saw as a necessity of nature (146-147). Was this really the same Hamsun who had revolutionized the Scandinavian novel forty years earlier, anticipating and shaping the direction of European modernist prose with works such as *Sult* (*Hunger*) and *Mysterier* (*Mysteries*)?

The questions and problems raised by these literary-political intersections are disturbing in ways that go beyond an individual writer’s regrettable opinions. This chapter’s title phrase, ‘unsettling modernity,’ has several resonances in the present context. The sociological condition of modernity itself has frequently been described as unsettling, destabilizing, ‘disembedding,’ melting-into-air, and so on.² Modernity splits open identities, communities, and places that previously were closed, rooted, solid, at-home. Modernization names a complex qualitative process that includes the spread of secular and technical rationality, liberalism, notions of progress and linear time, industrialization and urbanization, social mobility, among other changes. The dynamism of modernity exposes individuals and groups to an experience of placelessness, a literal or metaphorical exile, a challenge to cultural and personal identity, and an open-ended disruption of traditional structures of meaning and sense-making.

Alternatively, this chapter’s title can refer to literary modernism’s attempt to unsettle ideologies of the modern – modernism has often been theorized in terms of its disruptive or subversive relation to the world of bourgeois modernity, including for example the latter’s complacent conformism, rationalist and materialist assumptions, and leading political and economic framework of liberalism. As we know from examples in Anglo-American and European literature, the modernist or avant-garde critique of bourgeois modernity does not always land in a progressive or leftist political stance: think of Ezra Pound, Gottfried Benn, Ernst Jünger, or Wyndham Lewis. As I will underscore below, European aesthetic modernisms exist in the void left by the evacuation of liberal

² See for example classic texts by Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, and by Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*.

humanist certainties about democracy, progress, autonomous subjectivity, and liberty. The politics and ethics of a literature that emerges from this void are bound to be as diverse as they are unreassuring from the perspective of traditional liberal humanism.

As a final target of the adjective ‘unsettling’ we have fascism, a notoriously eclectic political ideology that drew on currents of Europe’s fin-de-siècle intellectual life and came to power after the catastrophic collapse of bourgeois values and economies in World War I. No longer considered simply an outbreak of abnormal irrationality in an otherwise securely enlightened and civilized West, fascism as studied today appears more deeply intertwined with modern (post-Enlightenment) culture.³ As I will discuss below, fascism (including National Socialism) has been interpreted as modern and as anti-modern; rational and irrational; futuristic and nostalgic; populist and elitist. These contradictions are partly a result of differing interpretative positions, but they are also based in the phenomenon of fascism itself. Fascism presents a twisted hybrid of modern techno-futurism and nostalgic ruralism; instrumental rationality at its most effective and atavistic, mythic unreason; the rigidly lockstep organization of the new racial collective and the supposed liberation of the vital energies and dynamism of youth. What is further unsettling about National Socialism in particular was its ability to appeal in many different ways, “in various keys,” to gather support for its “vast project for social, political, and racial renewal” (Fritzsche 9). Nazism has been so difficult to comprehend not only because of its ineffably traumatic results, but also because it frustrates notions of social, political, and economic classification – in Peter Fritzsche’s words, “the Holocaust destroyed expectations about how the world worked” (Fritzsche 14-15, 307).

More than just another political or economic category, fascism was a distinct and hopefully unrepeatable historical phenomenon of early twentieth-century Europe.⁴ The present inquiry aims to describe its appeal to three Norwegian writers and to explain their participation at the level of literary imagination, representation, and discourse. How does our knowledge of their fascist sympathies impinge on our understanding of Hamsun, who sent his Nobel prize to Joseph Goebbels in 1943, considering it a gift to a great idealist;⁵ of Jacobsen, who in the same year signed his name to an editorial saying that war was only as unpleasant and loathsome as the capitalist society created by the Jews;⁶ or of Sveen, who wrote in 1944 that National Socialism was a “new idealistic movement that seeks spiritual truth and arises from an elementary religiosity”?⁷ How should we explain the relationship between their literary texts, which we now understand as an essential part of Scandinavian modernism, and their malign ideological convictions? Such questions deserve a carefully specific rather than generalizing treatment, and I will attempt to maintain a sense of the idiosyncrasies and particularities of each case. On the other hand, a persistent myth about Hamsun views him as an enigmatic figure, as if his fascist sympathies were bafflingly unrelated to his literary imagination. While it is far from my

³ Stanley G. Payne has written helpfully about fascism, modernity, and modernization in *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (see especially 202-205 and 471-486).

⁴ See Payne’s discussion of “Fascism as a Unique Metapolitical Phenomenon” in his invaluable chapter on “Interpretations of Fascism” (441-461)

⁵ See description of this event in Kolloen, *Erobreren*, 271-274.

⁶ In an editorial: “Krigen er uhyggelig, opprørende og motbydelig. Den er like opprørende og motbydelig som den samfunnsordning som er skapt av jødene og pengemakten.” (*Glåmdalen* 27 Dec. 1943).

⁷ Sveen, Åsmund. “Hvorfor jeg er medlem av NS” (*Nationen* 29 Jan. 1944).

intention to equate their literature and politics, I regard the myth of the inexplicable enigma – whether it applies to Hamsun, Sveen, or Jacobsen – as obfuscation.

This dissertation argues that fascism, in its guise as a revolutionary remedy for the ills of liberal modernity, spoke to the utopian and ‘idealistic’ political imagination of these writers. Although each case presents its own variations, in general fascist ideology appealed to their desire for redemption, authenticity, and renewed national or ethnic community, imagined as a breakaway from the nihilism, rationalism, and uprooting of liberal modernity. It should be kept in mind that fascism was not the only possible – or actual – political home for their discontents and utopian impulses, but it is equally important to understand why it offered such fitting accommodations. While their turns from modernism to fascism were not inevitable, neither were they enigmatic. Hamsun, Jacobsen, and Sveen each crystallize – in different keys – the potential continuity between literary modernism and fascism, with each of these terms construed in relation to the cultural, technological, and spiritual conditions of modernity.

These authors are fascinating and significant in ways that go beyond the unsettling issue of Nazi collaboration. But, as Peter Sjølyst-Jackson remarks in relation to Hamsun, Nazism is a stain that doesn’t come out in the wash (93). It becomes not only an unavoidable mark on a localized part of the biography, but also something more pervasive – a stain that colors the whole body of (textual) material, seeps into the fibers of the fabric like an insoluble pigment. While this pigment may be distorting to some degree, I find that the greater risk is the assumption that – after fascism, after Auschwitz – the stain can be ignored. In the case of Hamsun, the various apologetic critical maneuvers that have been utilized to cleanse his authorship of its fascist residues – as if this were required to make it ‘safe’ for aesthetic appreciation – seem finally to have run their course. This study hopes to position itself outside the perpetual working-through of the Hamsun trauma and to view him from the start as definitely a modernist novelist (if only earlier in his career) and definitely a National Socialist (if only later in his career). The question that will matter here concerns the relationship between these two moments, not whether the latter is actually important or in dispute. Similarly, I consider Sveen and Jacobsen’s status as ‘Nazi sympathizers’ to be already thoroughly documented; my goal is to pose further questions for the analysis of their literary texts in light of these biographical facts.⁸

There are some methodological differences worth observing between a historical (social-sciences) approach to topic of ‘literature and fascism’ and a literary, humanities-based approach. These are not mutually exclusive; in fact, I aim to practice both here. But interdisciplinary research also benefits when it detects such differences, not only when it

⁸ The biographies I have consulted for this study have been very helpful, but they do not always perform more than cursory literary analyses. All of them have appeared within the past fifteen years.

For Hamsun, see Ingar Sletten Kolloen’s two-volume *Hamsun Svermeren* (Hamsun the Dreamer) and *Hamsun Erobreren* (Hamsun the Conqueror), also published in an abridged translation as *Knut Hamsun: Dreamer and Dissenter*. See also Jørgen Haugan’s *Solgudens fall. Knut Hamsun – en litterær biograf* (Fall of the Sun-God: Knut Hamsun – A Literary Biography) for more detailed readings of the novels.

For Jacobsen, see the two biographies from 1998: Ove Røsbak’s *Rolf Jacobsen: En dikter og hans skygge* (Rolf Jacobsen: A Poet and his Shadow) and Hanne Lillebo’s *Ord må en omvei: En biografi om Rolf Jacobsen* (Words Must Take a Detour: A Biography of Rolf Jacobsen).

For Sveen, see the engaging biography by Jan Olav Gatland, *Det andre mennesket: Eit portrett av Åsmund Sveen* (The Other Person: A Portrait of Åsmund Sveen).

disregards them. From a historian's perspective, the literary work might serve as evidence for a cultural consideration of fascism that would illustrate or document facets of its ideology. A literary perspective, on the other hand, tends to treat texts as semi-autonomous aesthetic objects – something more than historical documents or ideological illustrations. In *History, Politics, and the Novel*, Dominic LaCapra cautions against two extremes: both the historicist reduction of the text to a “documentary symptom of context” and the formalist fixation on the internal workings of texts (7). In this study, I hope to practice a type of historical formalism that blends the benefits of both extremes.

In the interpretation of fascism, humanities-based approaches have typically focused more on forms and styles of representation than on material and economic causes. As Andrew Hewitt remarks, while “the social sciences might wish to analyze the origins and consequences of fascism as a political movement, ‘humanist’ theories of fascism from the very first focused on questions of representation [and aesthetics]” (“Ideological Positions” 19). Hewitt also points out that ‘humanist’ theories of fascism – by which he means those predominant in the humanities, such as Walter Benjamin’s idea of the ‘aestheticization of politics’ – tend to operate at a rather abstract distance from empirical details and material circumstances.⁹ The somewhat generalizing sketches made in this chapter – of fascism and modernism as complex contributions and reactions to European modernity – are meant to provide an orienting framework for the literary analyses presented in the following chapters, not to explain the phenomenon of fascism in any comprehensive way.

The first part of this chapter, “Culture of Crisis,” discusses the variety of literary modernist responses to the condition of modernity and demarcates a subcategory called ‘irrationalist modernism.’ It would be wrong to imply that modernist literatures all share any singular political significance – this is far from the case. While there is no inevitable politics of form that would allow us to link, or worse, equate modernism and fascism at a general level, the potential for a convergence is now widely recognized. My approach to the tangled literature and politics of these writers also aims to begin with an adequate grasp of fascist ideology, as it has been complicated in recent history and theory. As will be clear from the second part of the chapter, “Rebirth of the New,” my perspective on fascist ideology, as well as its relationship to artistic modernism and European modernity, is informed by recent interdisciplinary work in fascist studies.

Culture of Crisis

The cultural formation we call literary modernism presents a broad range of ideological positions in response to the condition of modernity. While bearing in mind this multiplicity, this section also describes an irrationalist type of modernism that will help to comprehend the politics of Hamsun, Svein, and – to a lesser extent – Jacobsen. With the term ‘irrationalist modernism,’ I refer not to a singular aesthetic, but rather to a

⁹ Benjamin’s aestheticization thesis offers a helpful analytic tool for studies that focus on fascist styles of display and spectacle, but the idea of aestheticized politics is less revealing when it is treated as if it were a full analysis of fascism. J. M. Coetzee interrogates this idea in an essay on Benjamin: “Is politics as spectacle really the heart of German fascism, rather than resentment and dreams of historical retribution? If Nuremberg was aestheticised politics, why were Stalin’s May Day extravaganzas and show trials not aestheticised politics too? If the genius of fascism was to erase the line between politics and the media, where is the fascist element in the media-driven politics of Western democracies? Are there not different varieties of aesthetic politics?” (Coetzee 48).

type of modernist reaction to rationalist modernity that aligns itself with the ‘opposites’ of reason. Some sort of complaint against the dominance of instrumental or utilitarian rationality, one might argue, is common to almost all modernisms, as well as many aesthetic theories of modernism (such as Adorno’s). As Peter Nicholls writes in *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*, “the authentically modern subject” exists outside “the social moorings of the rational bourgeois self and its ‘counting-house morality’” (Nicholls 8). More specifically, irrationalist modernism casts aside bourgeois notions of reason, progress, and knowledge in favor of the supposedly higher or more authentic truths of aesthetic experience, sexuality and the erotic, or the natural landscape. In opposition to the alleged reductionism of mechanistic and materialistic science, this type of modernism has a vitalistic and neo-romantic streak that distinguishes it from both literary realism and from other more cerebral or ironic forms of modernism, such as Robert Musil’s.

First, let me disentangle and clarify some key terminology. In keeping with the ordinary usage of ‘modernity’ in sociological theory, the term here refers to the diverse phenomena of European socio-political and cultural modernization, including secularization, industrialization, the emergence of capitalism and its increased influence on social and international relations, rationalization, and the gradual dominance of liberalism in political and social thought. The terms ‘modernism’ and ‘modernist,’ however, will be used in their literary/cultural/aesthetic sense rather than in a sociological or historical sense. The difference to notice here is that the latter sense of ‘modernist’ basically means ‘in support of socio-political modernization or modern ideas,’ whereas the literary ‘modernist’ relationship to modernization tends to be more troubled, problematic, and ideologically miscellaneous. As the editors of a recent anthology observe, literary modernism, perhaps non-intuitively, names a cultural formation that “moves counter to the analytico-referential models of dominant Western rationality,” while on the other hand sociologists, historians, and philosophers often “use the concept of ‘modernism’ to label precisely these master narratives and social models” (“Approaching Modernism” 3).

A good example of this difference occurs in “Parataxis 3” of Susan Stanford Friedman’s helpful article on the meanings of ‘modernism’ and ‘modernity.’ Friedman first quotes from Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane’s classic 1976 anthology, *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature, 1890–1930*.

Modernism would seem to be the point at which the idea of the radical and innovating arts, the experimental, technical, aesthetic ideal that had been growing forward from Romanticism, reaches formal crisis – in which myth, structure and organization in a traditional sense collapse, and not only for formal reasons. The crisis is a crisis of culture. (Friedman 495; Bradbury/McFarlane 26)

This quotation illustrates the key idea that modernist formal experimentalism signifies a consciousness of crisis in European modernity. Bradbury and McFarlane emphasize the phrase ‘crisis of culture’ to make the crucial point that modernist formal sophistication, rather than existing for its own sake, often reflects the disorientation and chaos of its historical moment; modernism is the art that “responds to the scenario of our chaos” (27).

The second quotation that Friedman places next to this literary-historical one comes from James C. Scott's *Seeing Like a State*:

What is 'high modernism' then? It is best conceived as a strong, one might say muscle-bound, version of the beliefs in scientific and technical progress associated with the process of industrialization in Western Europe and North America from roughly 1830 until the First World War. At its center was a supreme self-confidence about continued linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs, and, not least, an increasing control over nature (including human nature) commensurate with scientific understanding of natural laws. (qtd. in Friedman 495)

Clearly, Scott utilizes 'modernism' to designate the rationalizing, techno-progressive, optimistic trust in socio-historical modernity. In the context of literary studies and for my present purposes, however, the concept of modernism remains closer to Bradbury and McFarlane's 'culture of crisis.' Indeed, Scott's description of 'modernism' could be used to identify what the authors in this study are reacting *against*. This example illustrates that – for reasons too complicated to present here – the term 'modernism' has taken on rather distinct meanings in (and also *within*) different disciplines.

European literary modernism was a reflection *of* and *on* the socio-historical process of modernization: 'modernism' designates a "not simply, but multiply Janus-faced" aesthetic activity responding to the cultural upheavals of that process (Sheppard 6). Theories of literary modernism converge around the idea of a "troubled and fluctuating aesthetic response to the conditions of modernity," in David Harvey's succinct formulation (98). Rather than reducing modernism to the content of this response, the most valuable contextual conceptions of modernism also emphasize the ideological significance of aesthetic form. For instance, Astradur Eysteinnsson's instructive account of the concept of modernism in literature explains modernist experimentation with non-traditional forms as a cultural-political act of 'subversion' or 'interruption' (at a formal level) of the genres of bourgeois modernity (Eysteinnsson 1ff).¹⁰ To read the cultural politics of a modernist work as embedded in its particular structure is to avoid predetermined notions of any single politics of modernism. Rather than bluntly aligning modernist literature with any ideological content, fascist or otherwise, this conception of modernism accounts for the numerous aesthetic and ideological variations found in the formally innovative texts called modernist.

Recent research in modernist studies has also tended to expand and pluralize our understanding of the locations and languages of the "modernist contribution and objection to modernity" ("Approaching Modernism" 4). Modernism's challenge takes many forms; the spatial image of modernism as a towering monolithic unity, or even as a tree with different branches, has been replaced by the image of "a bunch of burrows, or rhizomes that have grown in various directions" (5). Rather than an imposing unity, literary modernism designates an upheaval in multiple directions, a multifarious

¹⁰ Martin Humpál draws on this work in his interesting narratological approach to Hamsun's modernism, without examining the ideological implications. See *The Roots of Modernist Narrative* and my discussion of Humpál's work in the second chapter.

shattering of consensus about the ‘official’ narratives and models of social modernity. While scholars often emphasize modernism’s reaction to the estranged world of instrumental rationality, there are also key modernist writers, such as Robert Musil, who attempt “to see modernity not as an alienating force, but as a development that can be made productive,” reminding us again that we require a “differentiated understanding of modernism’s complex stance concerning modernity” (Martens 101-102).

The reason why modernism is such a stylistically and ideologically eclectic concept is that it has come to designate nothing less than several generations’ worth of artistic responses to the multiple crises of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century European culture and society. Even when restricted to literature, this enormously heterogeneous concept has the ability to name starkly opposed variations, from primitivism to futurism, from intense subjectivism to extreme impersonality. Yet, the concept retains its value and helpfulness. This study understands literary modernism in terms of the early-twentieth-century crisis of bourgeois humanist values and the accompanying senses of inner and outer chaos, loss of traditional meaning, uncertainty, doubt, and cultural disembedding that are usually associated with the process of modernization.¹¹

Modernism is an aesthetic vehicle for this consciousness of crisis, and in some cases it can be seen as a reflective judgment of modernization. Eysteinsson suggests in *The Concept of Modernism* that “this highly disturbed [modernist] conscience” expresses “a critical reaction to modernization, presenting its otherness, its negativity, that which is negated by the predominant modes of cultural production” (21). Matei Calinescu’s influential notion of a conflict between the “two modernities” – bourgeois modernity versus cultural/aesthetic modernity – suggests a similar opposition. On one hand, there is the bourgeois idea of modernity: technological progress, measurable quantities, the cult of rationality, a pragmatic orientation toward results, philistinism (Calinescu 41-43). On the other hand, the ‘antibourgeois’ modernity, beginning with Romanticism and leading into the twentieth-century avant-gardes, “was disgusted with the middle-class scale of values and expressed its disgust through the most diverse means, ranging from rebellion, anarchy, and apocalypticism to aristocratic self-exile” (42). As Calinescu helpfully points out, cultural modernity – and this includes literary modernism – may be better defined in terms of what it opposes and negates than by any shared positive stances; “what defines cultural modernity is its outright rejection of bourgeois modernity, its consuming negative passion” (42).

Many different diagnoses of crisis or judgments of bourgeois modernity are imaginable, and they are liable to vary greatly in terms of aesthetic form and the kinds of ‘otherness’ with which they confront modernization. For example, David S. Luft, in his book *Robert Musil and the Crisis of European Culture*, reads the artistic generation of 1905 as existing in an intellectual void left by the collapse or attenuation of most major nineteenth-century conceptions of progress, rationality, society, art, and humanity. This created “an intellectual vacuum” that was filled by ecstasy, ‘experience,’ charisma, and (eventually) mass politics and fascism (Luft 17). Luft distinguishes between two options to grapple with this situation of intellectual crisis; the first resorts to “the pathos of absolute rebellion” or irrationalism, while the second maintains “the ethical tension of the

¹¹ The emphasis on the term ‘disembedding’ and the amplification of doubt comes from the work of Anthony Giddens, for example *Modernity and Self-Identity*.

will, while honestly confronting the complexity and ambiguity of the actual world” (17). For Luft, Robert Musil’s writings exemplify the latter option; Musil is a literary essayist who pursued an open and “creative resolution to the revolt against positivism and bourgeois culture” (17). For other modernist authors with a less differentiated view of modernity, a creative dialogue with the open-ended present was less appealing than the surrogate transcendence offered by ecstatic experience in the aesthetic, the erotic, or the mystical.

In a brisk and stimulating attempt to introduce further distinctions in the theorization of European modernism, Richard Sheppard identifies, “at the risk of excessive categorization,” nine types of a modernist position in response to modernity. The positions can be summarized rapidly as (1) nihilism, despair, insanity; (2) ecstatic release or intoxication as liberation from crisis (of meaning, of language, of reason, etc.); (3) mysticism, Platonism, the esoteric and occult; (4) aestheticism that attempts “to establish art as something autonomous, a-historical and removed from the realm of rationalization and commercialization;” (5) a turn against the modern age in nostalgia for an ideal past or a utopian future; (6) primitivism that emulates non-European cultures; (7) ‘modernolatry,’ an unhesitating commitment to the world of technology, speed, industry, energy, as in Italian Futurism or Ernst Jünger; (8) “a pared-down humanism” characterized by “more ambiguous and more ironic attitudes to the complexities of modernity,” as in Musil; (9) a renunciation of nostalgia, the desire for epiphany or transcendence, an anarchic or ‘postmodern’ sense of liberation rather than loss (Sheppard 33-40).

Clearly, many individual writers would fit into multiple categories, but Sheppard’s heuristic catalog attests to modernism’s heterogeneity while providing an effective toolbox of ideal types that can be used to describe particular authors and texts.¹² This range of modernist responses to modernity differentiates our understanding of modernism’s ideological possibilities, revealing again how misguided it would be to equate modernism with fascism *tout court*. While none of these reactions necessarily entails a specific politics, some of them are clearly more compatible, in their extreme and perhaps simplistic dissatisfaction with modernity, with nostalgic or future-utopian politics. For instance, there is an important difference in terms of potential proclivity to fascism between a modernism that rejects and denigrates liberal or bourgeois society in a totalizing way, and one that seeks instead to alleviate or just come to terms with the spiritual, cultural, or political conditions of modernity.

The relevant positions in Sheppard’s catalog for my analysis of Hamsun, Sveen, and Jacobsen are the ones that react to the condition of modernity quite negatively as a crisis, degeneration, or deprivation. That is to say, the irrationalist modernism considered in this dissertation poses ecstatic release or intoxication as an alternative or antidote to the ills of an overly rationalized modern age (response 2). With an aesthetics of epiphany, such an irrationalism may also look to mystical, religious, or occult alternatives (response 3), or perhaps locate these in an harmonious pre-modern condition or a idealized future (response 5). And at the same time, this version of modernism may be aestheticist, in the sense that it configures art or aesthetic experience as something sacred and apart from a degraded everyday condition (response 4).

¹² Sheppard also provides a useful chapter on definitional problems in *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism*.

Irrationalist modernism locates salvation in the aesthetic and the erotic, which offer alternatives to modernity's 'iron cage' of instrumental rationalism. For Max Weber, the aesthetic functions as an autonomous and differentiated sphere in modernity, and it offers, in the words of one commentator, "salvation from the routines of everyday life, and especially from the increasing pressures of theoretical and practical rationalism." Similarly, Weber observed that eroticism offers a primary source of "inner-worldly salvation from the rational" (Scaff 748-749). Although the modernist text may include fantasies of harmony between mind and nature, or redemptive visions of authentic non-instrumentality, these are frequently undercut by an awareness of separation or disharmony, as in Hamsun's *Mysterier*. For the modernist, the will to re-enchantment may be accompanied by an extra layer of ironic or disharmonious awareness about the 'allegorical' nature of such a project.¹³ Nevertheless, in ways that differ between and within each authorship considered here, visions of redemption from liberal, rationalist modernity locate compensatory and regenerative value in the experience of nature (usually the Norwegian forest), the erotic, and the aesthetic.

Before turning to the next section to explore fascist ideology and discourse further, let me clarify a point about my use of the term 'irrationalist.' This term is meant to apply to the literary material in question and to delimit a certain range of modernist literary production. 'Irrationalist' may remind readers of Georg Lukács' critique of expressionism as a prelude to fascism or his drastic view of the ideology of modernism, both of which display an intolerance for the irrational that I do not share.¹⁴ Further, the term might suggest an interpretation of fascism as simply an outbreak of irrationality or as the necessary product of a culture that has abandoned Enlightenment conceptions of rational subjectivity. This raises a complicated set of issues in the interpretation of fascism. In an illuminating article on "Ideological Positions in the Fascism Debate," Andrew Hewitt utilizes the dichotomy of reason/unreason as an axis on which to differentiate theories of fascism: "the twin poles of theory have been Lukács and Adorno, who have served synecdochically to characterize theories of fascism as irrationality (Lukács) or as the outcrop of a radicalized and de-substantiated form of reason (Adorno)" (23). For reasons unlike those of Lukács, the postwar liberal consensus also tended to read fascism as an abnormal and regressive deviation from an essentially liberal historical progression (24).¹⁵ These remarks on the status of rationality in the theorization of fascism offer one example among many of how this complex historical phenomenon has inspired diametrically opposed readings. In fact, Lukács and Adorno represent only the

¹³ This is allegory in the sense of Paul de Man's influential usage. Peter Nicholls writes that allegories "function not to provide metaphysical reassurance, but to reveal the metaphysical itself as willed and constructed" (22). See also Kittang's readings of Hamsun's self-deconstructing 'novels of disillusionment' in *Luft, vind, ingenting*.

¹⁴ See Lukács' essay "The Ideology of Modernism" and his exchange with Ernst Bloch collected in *Aesthetics and Politics*.

¹⁵ Hewitt also designates a second axis of contradictory positions, on the poles of which are "theorists who believe that fascism marks the death of the subject and those who believe, instead, that it is the absurd realization of a de-substantiated, structural logic of subjectivity" (23). The latter linkage of fascism to the logic of the subject refers to the influential poststructuralist interpretation of Nazism offered by Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy (see "The Nazi Myth"). My perspective does not draw heavily on poststructuralist or postmodern readings of fascism, which tend to emphasize its continuity with Western rationality and the Enlightenment (see Woodley 22-23).

tip of an iceberg of conflicting interpretations of fascism.¹⁶ This dissertation emphasizes the cultural discourses of irrationalism and vitalism, not in order to portray ‘unreason’ as inherently fascist, but rather to understand the intersecting intellectual histories of fascism and Norwegian literary modernism.

Rebirth of the New

Historians such as Roger Griffin, Stanley Payne, and Mark Antliff employ a concept of generic fascist ideology that includes National Socialism in Norway and Germany, as well as Italian Fascism and other smaller, unsuccessful movements. While the idea of a generic European fascism is not accepted by all historians, it offers a great deal of insight into why fascism appealed to these Norwegian modernists. Despite important distinctions between regimes in different national contexts, “it is useful to treat fascism as a general type or generic phenomenon for heuristic and analytic purposes” (Payne 4). Diverging from most ideological criticism in studies of Hamsun, I draw on interpretations of fascist ideology that emphasize its utopian and modernist dimensions, in addition to its well-known nostalgic and regressive elements.¹⁷

This study’s model of generic fascism is derived from recent interdisciplinary scholarship loosely belonging to the so-called “new consensus” in fascist studies.¹⁸ This term is an admittedly artificial creation of the British historian Roger Griffin, and it has attracted criticism from other scholars who deny that there is any such agreement.¹⁹ Nonetheless, this ‘culturalist’ model provides a wealth of insight into the study of fascism’s relationship to the literary and artistic production of early twentieth-century Europe. Even critics have recognized its achievement in illuminating the nature of fascist ideology and culture in a range of contexts (Woodley 2-10). The operative understanding of fascism is encapsulated here in Griffin’s words:

Fascism is a genus of modern politics which aspires to bring about a total revolution in the political and social culture of a particular national or ethnic community ... generic fascism draws its internal cohesion and affective driving force from a core myth that a period of perceived decadence and degeneracy is

¹⁶ Payne offers a comprehensive overview of various interpretations, at the start of which he calls fascism “the only genuinely novel form of radicalism emerging from World War I, and one that seemed to involve multiple ambiguities if not outright contradictions” (441). See also Woodley’s more recent and very helpful accounts of theoretical approaches to fascism and ideological positions on fascism, rationality and modernity in *Fascism and Political Theory* (4-5, 23).

¹⁷ Similarly, my work on modernism and fascism also differs from Marxist approaches that have been common in Hamsun studies. These tend to assume an understanding of fascism as a reactionary-bourgeois or ‘late-liberal’ response to modernization. See Löwenthal and Giersing et al. as examples of this type of work on Hamsun, and see Griffin’s criticism of such approaches in *Modernism and Fascism*, 22-25.

¹⁸ For more on the idea of a “new consensus,” see the preface to Griffin’s *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus* (1998). Here he contends that a common understanding of the definition of generic fascism has emerged in scholarship, with a focus on the ideology’s utopian vision of an idealized and regenerated national community.

¹⁹ Woodley, a political theorist somewhat critical of ‘culturalist’ approaches, writes that the ‘new consensus’ was “founded less on scholarly agreement than a conscious rejection of historical materialism” (1). Moreover, the consensus is not shared by Italian and German historians, but is more limited to Anglophone studies (10). See also the recent *Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, edited by R. J. B. Bosworth, which scoffs at the idea of a ‘consensus’ among scholars.

imminently or eventually to give way to one of rebirth and rejuvenation in a post-liberal new order. (“The Primacy of Culture” 24)

As I unpack and extend this definition in what follows, I will focus on the features of fascism’s appeal that are most relevant to Hamsun, Jacobsen, and Sveen, who were drawn to it for reasons that sometimes conflict with the images of fascism predominant in American culture today. This section examines fascism’s appeal in terms of its myths of nationalist regeneration, its socio-economic attitudes, and its revolt against positivism and materialism in favor of an ‘idealistic’ conception of society.

Historians have often wondered how fascism was able to appeal to many writers, artists, and intellectuals in the interwar period. Following pioneering work by older historians such as George L. Mosse, Zeev Sternhell, and the more recent work of Griffin and others, humanistic approaches can fruitfully understand fascist ideology as a revolutionary reaction to the anomie, rootlessness, and disembedding effects of modern social and economic developments. Myths of renewal and regeneration after a period of dissolution played a large role in fascism’s appeal. Such myths can be found in many ideologies, including communism, but in fascism they support “projects of national, social, racial or cultural cleansing” that are “designed to bring about collective redemption, a new national community, a new society, a new man” (*Modernism and Fascism* 8). Woodley points out that in fascism’s counter-enlightenment modernity, “the ‘disruptive temporality of the new’ ... becomes entwined with a historicist retreat into identity: fascism connects a mythical past with an idealized future through the revalorization of archaic, patriotic and identitarian themes” (21).

In the thirties, the attempt to fabricate a ‘new man’ was a project shared by both fascism and communism, as well as other political and artistic programs. Whereas the communist ‘new man’ was a project of social and political re-education, in Nazism, a regime based on racial policy, the new human type was imagined as a project of biological regeneration (Clair 18-19). Peter Fritzsche has described how the biopolitical goal of “racial grooming” was essential to the National Socialist fabrication of a ‘new man’ and a nationalist collective. For instance, Hitler declared in 1933 that the new German regime would have to develop a new kind of person; this project would rely on modern biological techniques of racial hygiene and a visual regime that taught the Germans how to perceive desirable racialized bodies (Fritzsche 90-91). While not obsessed with racial purification in this manner, Italian Fascism also aimed to craft a ‘new man’ that was vigorous, violent, and liberated from the past, even as an idealized vision of Roman civilization served as a model for a regenerated, decisively modern nation (Bossi 43) The new Italian created by Fascism was to be “capable of saving the West from decadence, ‘bad’ modernity, the individualist hedonism of Western democracies ... and communist materialism” (44).

To understand its ability to attract supporters of many social types, and especially writers or artists, it helps to imagine fascism’s cultural revolution from the inside. As Mosse writes in the introduction to *The Fascist Revolution*, “Fascism considered as a cultural movement means seeing fascism as it saw itself and as its followers saw it, to attempt to understand the movement on its own terms” (x). This approach should be seen as a step toward an appropriate historical understanding of the allure it could have had for Hamsun, Jacobsen, and Sveen. Without some ability to imagine fascism’s appeal in this

way, the politics of these authors will continue to appear strangely separate from their literature. Also, we will underestimate what Griffin calls, “the genuine affective hold which the prospect of revolutionary change identified with Italian fascism and Nazism came to exert on the imaginations ... of entire swathes of disaffected [and] desperate citizens of every social category” (“The Primacy of Culture” 27). Of course, imagining fascism’s appeal should not allow us to forget its atrocities or relinquish our fundamental aversion. Griffin proposes that reading fascist texts can be an inoculation against the “fascist syndrome,” and he denies that there is a danger of rehabilitating fascism by being aware of its utopian appeal (*Fascism* 11).

While fascism has often been understood as reactionary and anti-modern (and anti-modernist), contemporary historians describe it as a revolutionary ideology desiring to establish an alternative to liberal modernity, one based on a mythical vision of nationalist regeneration in a new age. This rebirth would constitute a break with the modern society fascists perceived as spiritually empty, degenerate, corrupt, and lingering on the verge of an apocalyptic collapse. In the typical fascist imagination of such a utopian break, a new order would emerge from the ruins of the collapse. Incidentally, in the editorials he published in *Glåmdalen*, Rolf Jacobsen refers to this collapse and rebirth as “Ragnarok,” which was also the name of a Norwegian fascist journal in the thirties and forties.²⁰ This use of Ragnarok, the final battle and twilight of the gods in Norse mythology, displays how fascists often found informing narratives of destruction and regeneration in their own national-cultural past.

Their willingness to see fascism as a revolutionary blend of mythic-nostalgic and future-utopian impulses sets many contemporary scholars apart from traditional Marxist or postwar liberal understandings of fascism, which tended to see it as simply reactionary, regressive, or anti-modern. Phrases like “neither left nor right” (the title of a book by Zeev Sternhell) and “neither modern nor anti-modern” appear often in writings on fascism to denote its illegibility in terms of conventional (nineteenth-century) political categories. It is true that fascism generally stood against progressive Enlightenment universalism and individualism, against the idea of a limited constitutional state, and against liberalism as an economic and political philosophy. Yet, it bears repeating that fascism was not anti-modern or simply restorative; instead, it was “a complex ideological synthesis of old and new, of left and right” to quote Roger Eatwell’s discussion of the origins of fascist ideology (Eatwell 5). Further, as Payne explains, fascist ideas were derived “from the modern, secular, Promethean concepts of the eighteenth century.” He continues:

The essential divergence of fascist ideas from certain aspects of modern culture lay ... in the fascist rejection of rationalism, materialism, and egalitarianism – replaced by philosophical vitalism and idealism and the metaphysics of the will, all of which are intrinsically modern. Fascists aspired to recover what they considered the true sense of the nature and of human nature (themselves originally eighteenth-century concepts) in opposition to the reductionist culture of modernism materialism and prudential egotism. (Payne 8)

²⁰ See for example “Etter krigen” (*Kongsvinger Arbeiderbladet* April 16, 1941). Here, Jacobsen writes that “etter Ragnarok skal der bygges opp en sosial stat” (“after Ragnarok a social state will be built up”), a line I will discuss further in chapter four.

Thus, instead of seeing fascism as a restorative anti-modernism, contemporary approaches describe an alternative ‘fascist modernity’ that was both revolutionary-utopian and nostalgic for a mythical nationalist past. (Some forms of fascism, it should be noted, are pan-European or pan-Germanic rather than strictly nationalist.)

Fascism envisioned a future utopia based on a myth of ‘palingenesis’ (rebirth), the central term in Griffin’s definition of generic fascism. In *The Nature of Fascism*, from 1991, the definition reads: “Fascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism” (*The Nature of Fascism* 2). Fascist palingenetic myth selectively co-opts historical precedents in a given national culture to inform its vision of the new utopian order, which relies on a concept of the nation “as a ‘higher’ racial, historical, spiritual or organic reality” (37). Griffin’s complex and perceptive definition encompasses many aspects of fascism, including both its populist appeal and its appeal to intellectuals and artists with “myriad personal motivations” and “idiosyncratic conceptions of the movement’s goals” (27). Despite the criticisms mentioned above, this makes it the most useful definition available for studies of cultural figures and writers.

Against the social and economic individualism of liberalism, fascism located well-being in the national collective, considered as an organic entity that was as much spiritual as material. Fascism offered “a holistic-national radical Third Way” that was neither capitalist nor communist (Eatwell 14). Obviously, its nationalist and anti-materialist focus put fascism fiercely at odds with socialism and communism, even though it shared with them a critique of capitalism and laissez-faire economic policy. But, as Robert Paxton points out, what the fascists condemned in capitalism “was not its exploitation but its materialism [and] its indifference to the nation” (Paxton 10). Fascism’s aversion to capitalism was based on a revolt against the standardization and rationalism of bourgeois culture and industrial society; it offered a “Romantic anti-capitalism” rather than one based in Marxist theory (Antliff 19). The universal exchangeability of capital and the globalizing effects of capitalism threatened to dissolve particular national values and ethnic communities, which fascism in turn glorified.

Some historians trace the emergence of fascist ideology to the revolt against the positivism and mechanistic materialism of much late-nineteenth-century thought. Zeev Sternhell locates the origins of fascism in fin-de-siècle France as a combination of organic nationalism and anti-materialist revisionary socialism that stood against the humanistic and rationalist culture of the Enlightenment heritage.²¹ Likewise, Mark Neocleous writes that “at the heart of [fascism’s] arguments lies an essentially anti-materialist misology;” fascism replaces the central Marxist concepts of class, history, and revolution with nation, nature, and war, respectively (Neocleous 1, 11).

Revolting against rationalism and materialism, fascism positioned itself as a secular and idealistic surrogate for traditional spirituality – a “total conception of life” in the words of the philosopher Giovanni Gentile (*Fascism* 53). “The Doctrine of Fascism,” an article written by Gentile with Mussolini, describes the ideology as “a religious

²¹ However, Sternhell refuses to consider Nazism as form of fascism (see *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*). See Griffin’s criticisms of this position in “The Primacy of Culture,” 30-31. For another historian’s use of the fin-de-siècle moment to explain the origins of fascism, see Payne’s “The Cultural Transformation of the Fin de siècle” in *A History of Fascism, 1914 -1945*.

conception” that situates man in an “immanent relationship with a superior law and with an objective Will that transcends the particular individual and raises him to conscious membership of a spiritual society.” Fascism is more than an ordinary political system; it “is the form, the inner standard and the discipline of the whole person; it saturates the will as well as the intelligence,” and, in a mystical phrase, it is “the soul of the soul” (“The Doctrine of Fascism”). Gentile and Mussolini’s views of spirit, will, and the ‘whole person’ show that, unlike liberalism, fascist ideology addressed itself to more than ‘mere’ intellect or reason. It also appealed to a supposedly authentic spiritual experience, which seemed threatened by the inner compartmentalization of modernity.

Fascist discourse configures the materialism, nihilism, and liberalism of modern society as a degenerative threat to ‘culture’ or ‘spirit’ itself. Mosse claims that fascism’s appeal to experience was accompanied by an appeal to national or ethnic community, and to landscape: “it was an organic view of the world, which was supposed to take in the whole man and thus end his alienation” (12). This indicates the way that fascism deliberately conflated the spiritual and the political; national culture and racialized ‘spirit’ were the victims that it would rescue through its regenerative policies.

This emphasis on ‘spirit’ does not mean, however, that fascism wanted to restore religion to an overly secularized modernity. Fascism itself was a political ideology with a secular basis, not a religious ideology; it aimed to transform society in historical time through human agency (*The Nature of Fascism* 29). At the same time, it was idealistic in its rejection of rationalism and materialism, and it has often been interpreted as a political religion. This was certainly a major factor in its appeal to the anti-rationalists Hamsun and Sveen, while Jacobsen explicitly understood his Nazi commitment in hindsight as a replacement for his lost Christian faith. Payne claims that fascism “presupposed a post-Christian, postreligious, secular, and immanent frame of reference . . . it sought to re-create non-rationalist myth structures for those who had lost or rejected a traditional mythic framework” (9).²² As did many modernist writers, fascism looked to the instinctive, the mythic, and the irrational to construct secular forms of spirituality or enchantment.

In his description of the origins of fascism as an “alternative political culture” in fin-de-siècle France, Sternhell describes the writer Maurice Barrès’ emphasis on the “cult of deep and mysterious forces.” Barrès favored “impulses which determine human behavior and which constitute the reality and truth of things as well as their beauty” (*The Birth of Fascist Ideology* 10). According to this kind of thinking, the irrational has both a greater claim to truth and a greater aesthetic claim than do the intellectual and the rational. The extra feature that tilts this romantic anti-intellectualism into a more specifically fascist brand of thought is that rationalism is supposed to belong to the “deracinated” and to blunt the collective forces of national activity (10). To overcome such degeneration and deracination, the national and racial spirit would need to be reborn after a total break with the present.

Fascists often aligned the perceived destruction of experience, culture, and spirit in modernity with Jews, capitalists, or Americanism. In various national versions of fascism, this configuration of rationalist liberal culture as spiritual death and sterility was

²² This point also helps explain a key difference between fascist ideology and that of the conservative authoritarian right. The latter, notes Payne, based itself “upon religion more than upon any new cultural mystique such as vitalism, nonrationalism, or secular neoidealism” (16).

often opposed to a true native or local culture whose values the fascists co-opted and elevated (Linehan 333). Along these lines, Åsmund Sveen edited a propaganda anthology of Norwegian literary history during the war, based on a similar idea of an authentic national tradition that would provide values opposed to the degenerate anti-culture of modernity. It was called *Norsk ånd og vilje* (Norwegian Spirit and Will), and it included an ideologically twisted version of the national literary tradition that began with Eddic poetry, included Bjørnson and Ibsen, and ended with speeches by Quisling. Eivind Tjønneland argues in an article about this anthology that Sveen utilized selective citations from Norwegian literature to inspire nationalist sentiment and identification in a time when the ability ‘to feel Norwegian’ was allegedly threatened by the international influence of the English, the Jews, and the Bolsheviks (99-100).

The ideology of the Norwegian fascist party has been described as national-romantic, anti-urban, and nostalgic for a simpler, more ‘authentic’ dream of peasant society (Birkeland 10). There was a split in Norwegian fascism between “the Norwegian” and “the Germanic”: while the former focused on seemingly innocuous things like folk costumes, ‘family’ values, camping, and closeness to nature, the latter promoted a biological racism that favored Germanic unity against corrupting forces such as cultureless Americans, jazz, Jews, Bolsheviks, and democracy (Žagar 200-201) Although anti-Semitism became a key feature of *Nasjonal Samling* only after 1933, the ideology was always based on a view of Nordic racial superiority (186). The party’s leader, Vidkun Quisling, idealized the Viking period and claimed that Norway would lead the modern self-assertion of the Nordic race, whose purity and health were threatened; Hamsun was an avid admirer (186-187). This appropriation of the Viking past for the purposes of fascist palingenetic myth is quite apparent in much of *Nasjonal Samling*’s visual propaganda and iconography.

Years before Nazi Germany invaded Norway (April 9, 1940), Hamsun had praised a popular book by the Danish doctor Konrad Simonsen. This 1917 work, *Den moderne mennesketype* (The Modern Human Type) argued that material progress and comforts in modern Europe had been gained at the expense of soul and intuition; the modern type was rootless, mechanical, and empty (Žagar 38-39). Additionally, as Monika Žagar explains, a second premise of the book claimed “that the mixing of the healthy, noble Germanic race with other races, deemed inferior, has brought about ... the gradual process of de-Germanization (*Afgermanisering*)” (39). Hamsun’s fear of race-mixing and racial decline, though not exclusive to fascist ideology at his time, should be seen as a crucial impulse in his turn to National Socialism.²³

In Nazism, the threatening forces of liberalism, finance capitalism, and Bolshevism (contradictory as they are) were all condensed in the figure of the Jew. Political and economic fears, as well as fears of social fragmentation, were projected onto the racial enemy. As Fritzsche shows in *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, Nazism’s revolution was much more ‘biological’ than that of Italian Fascism. The National Socialist mental revolution was inseparable from its project of biologically engineering a new racial collective and breeding a “new German person” through modern techniques of racial hygiene and health (Fritzsche 90). This project necessitated the exclusion of the

²³ Žagar analyzes Hamsun’s views on race very thoroughly. Her recent study *Knut Hamsun: The Dark Side of Literary Brilliance*, makes a compelling case that Hamsun’s long-held notions of race and gender connect his wide-ranging literary production and his Nazi sympathies.

“undesirables” – Germany’s Jews, among others – to accomplish the “objective of creating new men and new women who would acknowledge one another as racial comrades” (91). In Nazism, as opposed to Norwegian and Italian fascism before World War II, national reinvigoration was to be accomplished through “radical surgery and biological cleansing;” this required a pitiless rejection of conventional morality and an adherence to the ‘purifying’ potential of new biomedical techniques (84-85). The Nazi murder of Europe’s Jews resulted from the regime’s central project of protecting the nation’s racial and political health from alleged forces of disintegration.

While Hamsun, Sveen, and Jacobsen did not express a virulent, ‘eliminationist’ anti-Semitism, they did occasionally voice a concern for the purity of “Germanic” Europe. These authors most likely did not realize that their visions of regeneration and redemption would entail the merciless elimination of Europe’s Jews and the other victims of the Nazi genocide. Yet, anti-Semitism and racism clearly constituted a major part of the regimes they decided to support in Norway and Germany, and I find arguments that they were not anti-Semitic somewhat suspect.²⁴ In hindsight, their commitment to National Socialism as a means of overcoming Europe’s spiritual and cultural crisis seem fatefully naïve in the worst way. Yet to grasp the genuine attraction of fascism for these writers, as I have been arguing here, we need to take seriously its claim to be a ‘spiritual’ or ‘idealist’ alternative to liberalism and communism – even though these elements should not be separated from its racist nationalism. It was this type of appeal that allowed fascism and Nazism to manipulate the widespread, if vague, desires for regeneration, rebirth, and revitalization that accompanied European modernity’s pervasive sense of decline, disintegration, and decadence.

The decision these authors made to support the myth of fascist utopian regeneration was not simply an unfortunate biographical event; it was intimately connected to the pattern of response to modernity laid out in their irrationalist modernism. In their literature, these authors locate the value of existence outside of the instrumental rationality, reductionist exchange value, and technical nihilism that characterize bourgeois modernity. They aspire to overcome this paradigm, in art through literary explorations of aesthetic, erotic, or existential depth, or in politics through a fantasy of fascist renewal. In my analyses of Hamsun, Sveen, and Jacobsen, I contend that anti-nihilist aesthetics and fascist politics both seemed to offer a means of overcoming modernity’s culture of crisis.

Conclusion

In a short and trenchant article about Hamsun, the Norwegian critic Arild Linneberg writes, “the image of fascist art as *Blut und Boden* fiction needs to be nuanced. Model: Marinetti and Italian Futurism. The fascists had their own avant-garde, and Hamsun was its leader. Another Norwegian example: the modernist poet Åsmund Sveen” (9).²⁵ Linneberg’s willingness to consider fascist aesthetics in relation to the avant-garde

²⁴ See Zagar’s clear-sighted discussion of Hamsun’s anti-Semitism for criticisms of some scholars’ equivocation about this (188-198).

²⁵ “Bildet av fascismens kunst som Blut und Boden-diktning må nyanseres. Modell: Marinetti og den italienske futurismen. Fascistene hadde sin avant-garde, som Hamsun var fører for. Et annet norsk eksempel: den modernistiske lyrikeren Åsmund Sveen.” Arild Linneberg, “Avantgardens Andre Ansikt: Hamsuns Poetikk” *Agora* 1/2 (1999).

reflects the now-familiar recognition of the thorny relationship between modernism and fascism. Scholars tend no longer to commit what Hewitt once called “the critical conflation of political and aesthetic ‘progressiveness’” (*Fascist Modernism* 39). The intersections between modernist literature and fascism may still be unsettling to those who imagine ‘the arts’ or ‘literature’ to be inherently worthy of ethical or political approval. As David Carroll contends in *French Literary Fascism*, the idea that an “‘authentic’ artist, writer, or critic ... could not be at the same time a political ideologue, a racist, or anti-Semite, that art and literature are in themselves opposed to political dogmatism and racial biases and hatred, constitutes nothing less than a mystification of art and literature” (8). Carroll’s study shows how the French literary fascists turned to the strong classical tradition in their national culture to construct a “more authentic, revolutionary form of modernity” that would at the same time create “a profound continuity with the authentic past ... the (re)birth of a ‘new man’ paradoxically modeled after a radical notion of an original, poetic ... ‘classical man’” (9). Although the ideological pattern here – anti-liberal revolution based on continuity with an authentic national past combined with a futural vision of the new man – is generically fascist, there is also a telling aesthetic contrast with Norwegian fascism. Without a strong tradition of classicism, Norwegian fascism could not look back to such an aesthetic to shape its vision of nationalist palingenesis. Instead, the Norwegian fascists drew on native forms of romanticism, Norse mythology, and folk culture. This contrast illustrates an important point about the aesthetic heterogeneity of the various European fascisms: as opposed to French neoclassicism, the Norwegian case shows the use of primitivism and vitalism as the aesthetic paradigms of a fascist modernity.

Broadly speaking, studies of the relationship between modernism and fascism have two potential emphases. First, there is the fascism of modernism: the fascist inclinations or sympathies of individual modernist literary or artistic figures such as Ezra Pound, Gottfried Benn, Filippo Marinetti, or the Norwegian authors in this dissertation.²⁶ Second, there is the modernism of fascism, meaning the way fascist regimes incorporated or co-opted modernist aesthetic principles, whether this was due to a canny use of propaganda or to inner similarities of aesthetic and social vision. In this case, the predominant focus has been on Fascist Italy and Italian Futurism. To a greater degree than Nazism, Italian Fascism is known for its modernist art, design, and architecture; there was no artistic movement as closely associated with Nazism as Italian Futurism was to the Fascist regime in Italy.²⁷ Griffin has tried to amend this picture by arguing that Nazism’s relationship to aesthetic modernism – despite the famous “Degenerate Art” exhibit – was not as wholly negative as is usually presumed, and that there was a space and function for modernism within Nazi culture (*Modernism and Fascism* 279-309).

Both approaches to the topic benefit when they understand modernism and fascism as separate, but potentially converging reactions to shared cultural and socio-

²⁶ To name a few works that take varying approaches to the issue in individual or national contexts: Fredric Jameson’s *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*; Charles Ferrall’s *Modernist Writing and Reactionary Politics*; David Carroll’s *French Literary Fascism*; and Richard Golsan’s edited volume *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture*.

²⁷ Emily Braun usefully describes this context in her book *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism: Art and Politics under Fascism*, explaining the shift in research during the 1980s from analyses of individual texts, movements, or objects to sociological analyses of cultural politics and public spectacle under Italian Fascism (Braun 7).

historical conditions. In his study of *Avant-garde Fascism* in France, Mark Antliff writes that “many of the paradigms that spawned the development of modernist aesthetics were also integral to the emergence of fascism,” and this shared reaction to the cultural environment acted as “a stimulus for alliances between modernists and anti-Enlightenment ideologues throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (Antliff 21). Similarly, Griffin identifies their common matrix as the search for transcendence and regeneration, “whether confined to a personal quest for ephemeral moments of enlightenment or expanded to take the form of a cultural, social, or political movement for the renewal of the nation or the whole of Western civilization” (*Modernism and Fascism* 39).²⁸ As a further example, Jobst Welge locates in the work of fascist modernists “new forms of subjectivity and collectivity that that were explicitly directed against what were perceived as the outdated assumptions of nineteenth-century literary realism and bourgeois subjectivity” (“Fascist Modernism” 547). He mentions Hamsun, with Benn, Celine, Lewis, and others, as authors who illustrate this tendency. Welge also cautions helpfully against placing ‘fascist modernism’ in a caged-off compartment; rather than enclosing it in a “monstrous, perversely fascinating corner of aberration,” we should acknowledge that the fascist tendency of modernism overlaps and converges with other, ideologically disparate forms (548). This point is highly relevant to the cases of Hamsun, Sveen, and Jacobsen: their audiences, as well as their own stances at different points in their careers, were quite heterogeneous in terms of political ideology.

Each of these writers, in various keys, confronts the ethical and spiritual void at the center of modernity, the alienating crisis of European culture, or the dislocation of identities and experience in the splintering velocity of the new. Partly voicing this chaos and partly recoiling from it, their literary works thematize in various ways the processes of disintegration and the searches for renewal that are central features of European modernism. Offering a variety of aesthetic modes, ranging from Hamsun’s novelistic anti-realism to Sveen’s vitalistic eroticism to Jacobsen’s urban expressionism, their literature has an enduring artistic value that should not be disregarded. However, their complex entanglements with the history and ideology of European fascism should not be disregarded either. As I argue in the following chapters, fascism furnished these authors with a distorted vision of redemption, a radical cure for liberal modernity’s socio-political and existential chaos, the temptation of a collective “ethical transformation” in a new order.

²⁸ The major problem with Griffin’s *Modernism and Fascism* is that it creates an ideal type of cultural modernism based around the idea of regeneration, which doesn’t fit enough of the literature or art called modernist, and then he intentionally and explicitly “maximalizes” the definition of ‘modernism’ to include not only aesthetic, but social and political movements as well. Thus, he argues that “fascism itself can be seen as a political variant of modernism” (6, see also 179-183), and he provocatively calls the First World War “a modernist event” (155) and Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* “a modernist manifesto” (260). Despite my reservations about Griffin’s “maximalizing” approach to modernism, his work remains the most comprehensive and ambitious contribution to recent studies of the modernism-fascism relationship.

Chapter Two

Reactionary Radicalism and Anti-Realism in Knut Hamsun's *Mysterier*

“Down in the swirling masses of mankind
slumber the eternal latent powers
that are wakened to life in historic times
geniuses no one has dreamt of yet
waiting for the call from nation and people
O great luminous geniuses”
- Knut Hamsun, 1893²⁹

Knut Hamsun is Norway's major modernist novelist, and he has also been called Norway's major fascist intellectual.³⁰ There was no other Scandinavian figure of a comparable stature who lent his support so fully to Italian Fascism or Nazism. Throughout his career, which lasted from the 1890s to the 1940s, Hamsun aligned himself with Germany, a country that devoured his literature enthusiastically, while he fashioned England as a natural arch-enemy: imperialistic, over-civilized, and unwilling to read his books. A rebellious outsider seeking freedom from constrictive form in both aesthetic and social-political spheres, Hamsun identified early and lastingly with what he saw as the more youthful and vigorous nation of Germany, the standard-bearer of energizing impulses in art and politics. As Modris Eksteins claims in *Rites of Spring*, “if central to an emergent modern aesthetic was a questioning of ... the prevailing standards of the nineteenth century, Germany best represented the revolt” (80). England, in contrast, was demonized as the conservative power maintaining a status quo of dessicating rationalism and degenerate civilization. In 1910, Hamsun wrote that “the Anglo-Saxon has derailed *life*,” a term that for him meant everything threatened by bourgeois modernity (*Erobreren* 77, my emphasis). In defense of ‘life,’ Hamsun eventually championed Germany's barbarian renewal, greeting National Socialism as a force that would lead Europe “into a new age and a new world” and create the conditions for pan-Germanic cultural and racial regeneration (248, 285).

Yet, more than simply the literary Quisling, Hamsun had admirers of many political stripes and nationalities, and he was in his seventies by the time he expressed support for fascism. Hamsun's authorship spans many decades of artistic and political upheaval in Europe, beginning with his iconoclastic anti-realist lectures and the fin-de-siècle psychological novels that have attracted the most critical and scholarly attention, often as modernist texts: *Sult* (Hunger, 1890), *Mysterier* (1892), and *Pan* (1894).³¹ In a

²⁹ “Men nede i den svirrende menneskehed / der slumrer de evige latente kræfter, / som vækkes tillive i historiske tider / genier, som ingen har anet endnu, / ventende på kaldet fra landet og folk, / å store strålende genier” (qtd. in Kolloen, *Svermeren*).

³⁰ “Han var og er den viktigste norske fascistiske intellektuelle. Og han blei det som en avantgardedikter.” See Arild Linneberg, “Avantgardens Andre Ansikt: Hamsuns Poetikk.”

³¹ The middle and later periods of Hamsun's authorship, to use the conventions phases, practice a social realism in rural settings in what often seems like an aesthetic regression. Later novels such as the *Landstrykere* trilogy of the early 1930s, though very popular in their own time and particularly in Germany, do not exert the same fascination as the early, modernist works. There has, however, been a solid strand of critical interest Hamsun's realism and the later phases of his authorship. A recent example that also discusses Hamsun's politics is Ståle Dingstad's *Hamsuns strategier: realisme, humor og kynisme*.

move that appalled the small country that lionized him as a national symbol, Hamsun published pro-Nazi newspaper articles during the eight weeks of Norwegian resistance to the German invasion. In one of these articles, published in May 1940 in *Fritt Folk*, the journal of the Norwegian fascist *Nasjonal Samling*, Hamsun notoriously exhorted Norwegians to put down their weapons and let the Germans rule. Such articles led to his trial for treason, his time under psychiatric observation, and eventually his final work, a disturbingly poignant record of the immediate post-war years called *Paa gjengrodde stier* (On Overgrown Paths, 1948).³²

How should one understand the connections between Hamsun's literary modernism and his ideological fascism? A straightforward but nonetheless important observation is that Hamsun's modernism and his fascism are not simultaneous. The texts that critics have described as modernist were written in the 1890s, while his public fascist sympathies did not appear until the 1930s. This circumstance presents a further historiographical question: How do historians locate or date the origins or emergence of fascism as a cultural and political ideology? In what terms can one speak of a historical and ideological connection between Hamsun's early modernism and his subsequent fascism without resorting to teleological reductionism?

These issues are not new in scholarship or public debates about Hamsun; the problem of Hamsun's fascism or Nazism is hardly under-discussed. However, prevalent understandings of Hamsun's modernism find it irrelevant or contrary to his fascism, while discussions of Hamsun's fascism are often fairly narrow, confining the issue to a stock image of Nazism circa 1940, even though both European fascism and Hamsun's involvement with it were longer and more nuanced. Indeed, although readers and critics tend to compartmentalize Hamsun's literary modernism and his fascism, they are deeply implicated in each other in ways that this chapter will examine. Hamsun's modernism is more than the creation of new prose forms to narrate unconscious psychological life, surpassing realism and naturalism; there is also a cultural-critical and ideological facet of Hamsun's anti-realist revolt. His famous subversion of the Scandinavian "Modern Breakthrough" tradition of realism and liberalism is at once aesthetic and ideological.

With a focus on the 1892 novel *Mysterier*, this chapter argues that key features of Hamsun's modernist fiction – irrationalism, anti-positivism, the opposition to bourgeois materialism (both scientific and cultural), and 'reactionary radicalism' – were sustained in his fascism and in many ways provided an affective and intellectual foundation for his political allegiance. In other words, Hamsun's fascist sympathies in the 1930s and 1940s were consistent with and arose from socio-political values and viewpoints traceable to the earliest parts of his authorship. Such a continuity is especially apparent when we consider that fascist ideology emerged from the intellectual revolts against materialism, positivism, bourgeois society, and liberal democracy at the European fin de siècle, as discussed in the previous chapter.

³² All of Hamsun's egregious wartime articles, and many other relevant nonfiction documents from throughout his career, are available in Hermundstad's *Hamsuns polemiske skrifter*. Also useful as a source in this regard is Nilsson's *En ørn i uvær: Knut Hamsun og politikken*. Peter Sjølyst-Jackson offers an exceptionally interesting analysis of *Paa gjengrodde stier* in *Troubling Legacies*, 135-153.

This analysis will not project a full-fledged notion of Nazism backwards onto the early Hamsun. Obviously, *Mysterier*, a convoluted and hallucinatory “anti-novel”³³ from 1892, cannot be reduced to an anachronistic expression of Nazi ideology or aesthetics. It would be erroneous to claim that *Mysterier* exemplifies National Socialist literature, even if we were to expand that category somehow to include works that weren’t written in German between 1933 and 1945.³⁴ While in itself obvious enough, this observation should not be a conclusion; there are other ways to understand the novel’s relevance to Hamsun’s fascism. Øystein Rottem, borrowing a term from Hamsun’s essay on Strindberg, has suggested that “reactionary radical” is central for understanding Hamsun’s early period (*Fantasiens triumf* 9-10).³⁵ Likewise, I will designate Hamsun’s ideological standpoint in the 1890s as ‘reactionary radicalism’: an anarchistic and civilization-critical mélange of Rousseau, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and especially Strindberg. This perspective arises through the narrative form and thematic structure of *Mysterier*, a novel that has already been a key reference point in discussions of Hamsun’s literary modernism and also his fascism, despite its early date.³⁶

Whereas ideological discussions of Hamsun’s literature often construe fascism in conventional Marxist terms, as an outgrowth of ‘late-liberal’ or bourgeois ideology, this study, as the previous chapter makes clear, understands fascism as an ideology of utopian nationalist renewal. I find that Hamsun’s affinity to fascism should be understood in terms of a bipolar, not merely regressive, ideological dynamic. The paradoxical-sounding concept of reactionary radicalism is pertinent in this regard, especially when we consider the emergence of early fascist discourses in turn-of-the-century Europe. Few would argue on the evidence of the 1890s Hamsun alone that fascism was his sole political possibility. The more common position separates Hamsun’s early works into a modernist bubble whose connection to the author’s later ideological trajectory is enigmatic. To avoid such an artificial disconnect, fascism should be understood not as a static structure of the interwar regimes in Italy and Germany, but as a developing ideological context that drew on diverse strands of turn-of-the-century European culture and politics. Hamsun’s eventual embrace of this new political ideology as the ethical redemption of Norway and ‘Germanic’ Europe was surely a contingent development – there were other potential directions he could have taken – but this should not obscure its deep connection to his early reactionary radicalism.

Hamsun’s modernist critique of bourgeois modernity, rationality, and positivism emerges from the same climate of cultural crisis that spawns fascism, and it also exhibits the attitudes that historians call fascism’s ‘negations’ – its anti-bourgeois, anti-rationalist,

³³ I discuss this term more in the second part of this chapter. See Martin Humpál, “Mysterier som antiroman” (*Hamsun i Tromsø IV*).

³⁴ Karl-Heinz Schoeps writes in *Literature and Film in the Third Reich* that “the difficulty of defining Nazi literature is attributable to the fact that National Socialism never developed a uniform concept of literature and was unable to agree on what constitutes a binding canon of National Socialist literature” (3).

³⁵ Rottem chooses to describe Hamsun as a “reactionary modernist,” modifying the term “reactionary radical.” I will stick with the latter term because the term ‘reactionary modernist’ is associated with Jeffrey Herf’s classic work on German conservative revolutionaries.

³⁶ For the modernism discussion, important recent sources are Martin Humpál, *The Roots of Modernist Narrative: Knut Hamsun's Novels Hunger, Mysterier, and Pan* (Oslo: Solum, 1998), Atle Kittang, *Luft, Vind, Ingenting: Hamsuns Desillusjonsromaner frå Sult til Ringen Sluttet* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1984), and Øystein Rottem, *Hamsun og fantasiens triumf* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 2002).

anti-proletarian, anti-liberalist, and anti-materialist stances.³⁷ As I have already argued in the introductory chapter, there is in general an underlying potential for convergence between fascism and the cultural criticism found in certain types of literary modernism. Fascist ideology had a particularly strong purchase on the irrationalist modernist imagination and sensibility, for which Hamsun is paradigmatic in the European novel.

This chapter has two main parts, and the reader interested primarily in a reading of *Mysterier* may wish to skip the first one. In Part One, while providing a brief view of the history of the Hamsun debates, I claim that his modernism and fascism have become unduly separated and that an attempt to understand their connection is needed. I go on to reject the idea of retrospective inevitability, or ‘backshadowing,’ in understanding Hamsun’s literature and politics, and to suggest a better way to grasp the narrative of his career that recognizes both the contingency and the non-mysterious continuity of his development. Part One also briefly revisits some historical scholarship on the emergence of fascist ideology at the fin de siècle and addresses some problems with existing formalist approaches to Hamsun’s modernism.

Part Two of this chapter analyzes the novel *Mysterier* and some nonfictional texts from the 1890s, aiming to reveal how Hamsun’s reactionary-radical and anti-positivist ideological positions are expressed in his fiction. I argue that *Mysterier* carnivalizes the aesthetic and ideological program of the liberal and critical-realist Modern Breakthrough, the preceding period in Scandinavian literature. In my reading, the fragmented form of *Mysterier* subverts the logic of realist narrative, replacing ratiocination and disambiguation with indeterminacy and epiphany. I conclude that, far from an end-of-career anomaly, Hamsun’s fascism was a continuation of the adversarial cultural project that began in the 1890s with his modernist revolt against positivism and realism.

PART ONE

The Hamsun Problem: Historical and Critical Considerations

In his 2004 literary biography of Hamsun, *Solgudens fall*, Jørgen Haugan contextualizes the extent of Hamsun’s fall from grace in the Norwegian literary culture that had made him into a national hero and ‘Sun god.’ In Haugan’s view, Hamsun’s treasonous collision with Nazism was especially traumatic for the young ‘poetocratic’ nation that was accustomed to glorifying its literary greats as representative national heroes, as with Henrik Wergeland, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, and Henrik Ibsen (Haugan 13-21). Today, debates about Hamsun persist not only in literary criticism, but also in Norwegian public life, reappearing in newspaper debates whenever, for example, a street or square named after Hamsun is under consideration. This author remains a controversial figure in Norway; recently, a theater in Trøndelag declared itself a “Hamsun-free zone” during the 2009 “Hamsun Year” celebration of the 150th anniversary of his birth.³⁸

Peter Sjølyst-Jackson points out that the question “Was Hamsun a Nazi?” usually ends up provoking “the blinded compulsions of condemnation and apologia” (4). Much postwar critical commentary on Hamsun’s literature occupies one of the two polarized positions: ideological unveiling or aesthetic apology. The former tends to condemn Hamsun’s work in political or moral terms by aligning it with Nazism, while the latter

³⁷ Linz 12-13; Griffin’s *Fascism* 4-8.

³⁸ <http://www.nrk.no/nyheter/kultur/1.6431087>

position protects the literature for apolitical appreciation. In these non-nuanced stereotypical formulations, each position has obvious problems. While ideological readings have often been accused of interpretive reductionism or lack of attention to the aesthetic and formal features of Hamsun's texts,³⁹ apologetic attempts to explain away the issue of Hamsun's political engagements or make them seem irrelevant to his literary achievements often seem unconvincing.⁴⁰

In recent decades this polarization between critique and apology has lost its hold somewhat, perhaps because historical distance from the Second World War makes Hamsun approachable in ways less guided by a need either to condemn or to protect. Atle Kittang, the author of an essential psychoanalytic/deconstructionist study of Hamsun's modernism, has diagnosed postwar apologetic avoidance maneuvers and reductive ideological readings alike as "defense mechanisms" that transform Hamsun from an object of ambivalence into an object of simple love or hate. In this way, suggests Kittang, interpretive myths were formed, such as the one that splits Hamsun into a bad philosopher or politician, but a great writer (*Luft, vind, ingenting* 12-14).⁴¹ On the other hand, Kittang's own readings of Hamsun's "novels of disillusionment" have earned accusations that he practices a new kind of apology that obscures ideological elements of Hamsun's literature.⁴² I will return to this issue below in the section on formalist approaches to Hamsun's modernism.

Any contemporary critical approach to Hamsun's literature and fascism enters a terrain of research that has also been the subject of a protracted public debate. Øystein Rottem, who wrote a work of ideological criticism on the *Landstrykere* (Wayfarers) trilogy in the seventies and has more recently interpreted Hamsun's novels in relation to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Simmel, characterizes the Hamsun debate in legal terms:

Hamsun-debatten [har] kommet til å ligne en forskutt og forlenget rettsak, en prosedyre – med aktorer, forsvarere og dommere, med innlegg der Hamsun blir angrepet ... [og] med innlegg der Hamsun framstilles som nazist i hele sitt vesen og i hele sitt menneskesyn. Og på den annen side – med innlegg der Hamsun unnskyldes, der formildende omstendigheter trekkes fram, der mennesket, og ikke minst diketeren Hamsun blir frikjent, eller i alle fall blir gitt absolusjon og tatt til nåde. (9-10)

³⁹ There is a strong tradition of Marxist ideology critique in Hamsun studies that goes back to the early interventions of the Frankfurt School's Leo Löwenthal in the 1930s and was expanded by several Scandinavian works from the 1970s. See Leo Löwenthal, "Knut Hamsun" in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. ed. A. Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1982), 319-345; Leo Löwenthal, *Das bürgerliche Bewusstsein in der Literatur*. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981); and, for example, Morten Giersing, John Thobo-Carlson, and Mikael Westergaard-Nielsen. *Det Reaktionære Oprør: Om Fascismen i Hamsuns Forfatterskab*. (Kongerslev, Denmark: GMT, 1975).

⁴⁰ A recent example of this is the treatment of Hamsun's politics and ideology in *Knut Hamsun: A Critical Assessment* by Sverre Lyngstad, the translator of recent English versions of Hamsun's main novels.

⁴¹ Kittang has also suggested that the conventional division of Hamsun's authorship into phases has functioned as a critical myth, rooted so securely that it has the status of a literary historical fact. The idea of a break around 1910 when Hamsun goes from bohemian and rootless artist to farmer – with a shift from a psychological modernist to a social realist aesthetic – can make the authorship seem overly discontinuous at a thematic and ideological level.

⁴² See Langdal's scathing criticisms of Kittang in "Hvordan trylle bort det ubehagelige?"

(The Hamsun debate [has] come to resemble a prolonged legal case, a hearing – with prosecutors, defenders, and judges, with pleadings where Hamsun is attacked ... [and] with pleadings where Hamsun is portrayed as a Nazi in his entire being and his entire view of humanity. And on the other hand – with pleadings where Hamsun is excused, extenuating circumstances are brought forth, where the person, and especially the writer of fiction, is acquitted, or in any case given absolution and restored to favor.)

Rottem suggests avoiding a moral, psychological, or juridical perspective, and instead positions Hamsun's work in its early twentieth century intellectual and ideological context (13). He also maintains that critics should dispense with the myth of Hamsun as an 'enigma' and acknowledge that his actions in the 1940s were consistent with opinions he had long held and revealed in his literature.⁴³ Thus, Rottem helpfully provides a blueprint for understanding Hamsun's reactionary-radical modernism in an intellectual-historical context.

Nevertheless, the assumption that modernism and fascism are mutually irrelevant seems more widespread than Rottem's willingness to recognize and explore their correlations. Although the apologetic split between the essential literary genius Hamsun and the incidental fascist Hamsun is no longer a strong position, there remains a split between the modernist and the fascist. This is seemingly licensed by the authorship's chronology, but it obscures the continuities that make Hamsun a crucial figure for larger literary-historical issue of 'fascist modernism.' To take a recent example in which this division is fairly subtle: in January 2009, the critic Lasse Midttun wrote an article in *Morgenbladet* to greet the "Hamsun year" celebration in Norway. The article begins with a plea I wholly support: "Selvsagt var Hamsun en strålende forfatter, og selvsagt var han nazist. Kan vi starte derfra?" ("Of course Hamsun was a brilliant author, and of course he was a Nazi. Can we begin there?"). Midttun goes on to argue that the disproportionate postwar interest in the 1890s modernist Hamsun has allowed Norwegian critics to avoid confronting any connection between the author's beloved literature and his unloved actions during the Second World War.⁴⁴ He continues (in my translation):

Hunger is not only one of the best novels ever written, it is also modernistic and radical in form, and has as its hero a person as distant from Nazi structure and form as it is possible to be. In general, it was incredibly difficult to be a Nazi in 1890, because the founder of Nazism, Adolf Hitler, was only a year old. [Hamsun's early novels] worshipped the inexpressible, the lyricism and romanticism of nature, the unachievable dream of the perfect woman, and other themes that are hardly Nazi.⁴⁵

⁴³ *Enigma* was the title of a 1987 biography by the English writer Robert Ferguson.

⁴⁴ Haugan makes a very similar claim in *Solgdens fall*: "For å slippe unna de ubehagelige problemene ved Hamsuns politiske engasjement, ble det en behagelig utvei å fordype seg i hans diktning fra 1890-årene" (419). ("To avoid the uncomfortable problems of Hamsun's political engagement, it became a comfortable way out to immerse oneself in his writing from the 1890s.")

⁴⁵ <http://www.morgenbladet.no/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090116/OBOKER/558418717>

As Kittang has noted, an apology based on Hamsun's vitalism or romanticism of nature is a "two-edged sword," because Marxist critics have typically argued that Hamsun's fascist tendencies are intimately related to precisely these features of his work (14).⁴⁶ Nonetheless, Midttun makes an acceptable point when he writes that Hamsun's early works are not typical examples of Nazi ideology, personality, or form – but why would we expect them to be?

No individual Hamsun novel, viewed in isolation, can justly be called fascist literature, not even *Markens Grøde* (The Growth of the Soil), which has often been read through categories of fascist aesthetics such as "Blut und Boden." The critic Jon Langdal concedes this even in an article that excoriates the "ahistorical and melancholy" literary establishment in Norway for what he regards as a scandalous failure: the choice to protect the myth of Hamsun as an enigma rather than to analyze his connections to fascist cultural and ideological discourses.⁴⁷ In any case, *Markens Grøde* is certainly more complicated than the "Blut-und-Boden" reading would suggest, and unlike most German fascist literature, it was received enthusiastically by diverse political groups, leading to Hamsun's Nobel Prize in 1920.⁴⁸ (Thomas Mann wrote that no author had ever been more deserving of the prize; Hamsun sent it to another admirer, Joseph Goebbels, in 1943.)

Why expect a flagrant and anachronistic exemplification of "Nazi structure" in Hamsun's early novels? It should come as no surprise that the form and content of these novels are not National Socialist thirty to forty years in advance. The point is that narrowing in on the early Hamsun is an effective avoidance strategy only if one assumes that these texts must display some manifest "Nazi structure" to be considered relevant to Hamsun's fascism. But, granting that there is no direct and immediately legible connection to Nazism in this black-and-white way, how is a modernist text like *Mysterier* nonetheless relevant to Hamsun's fascism?

Backshadowing and Sideshadowing

More specifically, how should we explain the connection between Hamsun's early modernism and his later fascism without constructing a retrospective teleology? Hamsun's course from modernism and reactionary radicalism to fascism was contingent, not laid out in advance by some historical necessity. Yet, because Hamsun's late-in-life fascism has the power to exert considerable backwards pressure on our narrative understanding of his entire literary output, the risk of 'backshadowing' is considerable and worth discussing.

The term 'backshadowing' was coined by Michael André Bernstein in *Foregone Conclusions*, a work that criticizes the tendency in historiography and biography to attribute retroactive significance to events or texts written years before they could properly have such significance. Bernstein describes backshadowing as "a kind of

⁴⁶ For Löwenthal, the view of nature expressed in Hamsun's authorship is symptomatic of a "late-liberal" (*nachliberalistisch*) and proto-fascist ideology, in which the freedom and harmony lacking in modern industrial society are projected onto nature. A Danish study from the seventies expands such a reading of Hamsunian nature as a symptomatic disclosure of the author's reactionary politics, constructing a system of nature-culture oppositions with which to understand the entire authorship (Giersing et al.).

⁴⁷ Jon Langdal, "Hvordan trylle bort det ubehagelige?"

⁴⁸ For information about Hamsun's reception history in Germany, see Schulte, *Hamsun im Spiegel der deutschen Literaturkritik 1890 bis 1975* and Uecker, "Tendenser i tysk Hamsun-forskning."

retroactive foreshadowing in which the shared knowledge of the outcome of a series of events by narrator and listener is used to judge the participants in those events *as though they too should have known what was to come*” (16). As he writes elsewhere, in history, “there are always multiple paths and sideshadows ... each of which is potentially significant in determining an individual’s life, and each of which is a conjunction, unplotable and unpredictable in advance of its occurrence, of specific choices and accidents” (12). Bernstein’s particular concern at the moment of this formulation is the narrative historiography of the Holocaust, but his model of backshadowing is meant to be more generally applicable.

Being aware of the risk of backshadowing is especially important in studies focused primarily on Hamsun’s early fiction. Previous political interpretations of *Mysterier* have dubiously located its ‘proto-fascism’ in singled-out statements by the anti-hero Nagel, for example his call for “the great terrorist” or other content that provides “tawdry frissons”⁴⁹ of recognition for the post-Hitler reader. Such readings assume that these statements had the same charge in the 1890s as they did in the 1930s, with its vastly different political horizon, and they imply a linear and inevitable historical progression towards fascism. Bernstein promotes instead the “discretion that sideshadowing is particularly concerned to teach us,” which requires “not seeing the future as pre-ordained,” and, in his careful and precise wording, not using “our knowledge of the future as a means of judging the decisions of those living before that (still only possible) future became actual event” (16). Recognizing this sense of the “still only possible” is crucial for understanding the politics of Hamsun’s modernist moment with the discretion of sideshadowing, with its “attention to the unfulfilled or unrealized possibilities of the past” (3).

Importantly, however, this critique of backshadowing *does not* encourage any willed ignorance to actual historical events; it “does not cast doubt on the historicity of what occurred but views it as one among a range of [equally plausible] possibilities” (7). Pretending to bracket our knowledge of “what was to come” when dealing with the early Hamsun is unsatisfying. The idea of sideshadowing provides a historical and political approach to Hamsun’s early fiction that keeps in mind *both* the possible *and* the actual futures that were potential in its moment. Sideshadowing thus allows us to recognize the contingency of Hamsun’s development while also satisfying a need to comprehend his actual history. As Peter Gay writes about Hamsun in the “Eccentrics and Barbarians” section of *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy*: “to support fascism was not an inescapable consequence of his life’s record. Yet in retrospect it was likely enough” (413). (Gay goes on to discuss Hamsun’s lifelong villainization of the English and his cultural and attitudinal affinity for the younger nation, Germany.) To construe the early Hamsun’s relation to his later fascism in this contingent way is not the same as to impose an extraneous and subsequent ideological framework, or to plot his early literature in a narrative of tragic or scandalous necessity.

Lars Frode Larsen’s enormous three-volume empirical work on the early Hamsun, which ends in 1893, offers a potential alternative to backshadowing. However, Larsen refuses to delve into *any* relationship between the early Hamsun and the later fascist. In a generalized accusation, he writes, “bildet av den elder reaksjonære forfatter er etter mitt syn feilaktig blitt projisert bakover i tid og gitt gyldighet for hele hans livsløp” (“the

⁴⁹ *Foregone Conclusions* 17.

image of the older reactionary author has in my view been falsely projected backwards in time and made to appear valid for his entire life”) (Larsen 12). Larsen would have us view Hamsun’s political intentions solely from the beginning of his career – which he documents as a moment of anarchism and leftist radicalism – not from the end. This approach disregards Hamsun’s later history in a way that, as we have seen, is not part of sideshadowing. To Larsen, it seems “kunstig og langt på vei meningsløst å operere med termen ‘nazisme’ i en analyse av historiske og litterære forhold før 1918 – og jeg slipper altså Hamsun allerede i 1893!” (“artificial and utterly meaningless to use the term ‘Nazism’ in an analysis of historical and literary conditions before 1918 – and I finish with Hamsun already in 1893!”) (12). There is an important if obvious historical point here, but Larsen (like Midttun) seems to assume that any interest in the early Hamsun’s connection to fascism or Nazism would be bluntly classificatory and anachronistic. Additionally, he periodizes Hamsun’s politics into an early far-left radicalism and a late reactionary position, equating the latter with fascism, but this ignores the oft-noted presence in fascist ideology of both the right-reactionary and the left-radical, especially during the early stages of its formation.⁵⁰

Larsen thinks that the postwar reader of the early Hamsun should simply discount his or her knowledge of Hamsun’s fascist sympathies and his eventual complicity in the Nazi genocide. Because his alternative to backshadowing sees Hamsun’s development exclusively from the beginning, Larsen ignores the early Hamsun’s *actual* future, and in so doing he suppresses questions relevant to our own sense of the past. The question of how Hamsun’s enthusiastic fascism was connected to his early literary modernism presents a challenge for historical understanding, rather than a chance to ignore what happened after World War I.

Fascist Ideology and the Fin de Siècle

What parallels existed between Hamsun’s cultural politics and fascist discourses, such that when fascism became a public force, it garnered Hamsun’s support for its Norwegian, Italian, and German expressions? Since the thirties, when Hamsun’s fascism first became public, critics have asked how this political position was related to the literature he had produced over his long career. With their varying ideological positions and interpretive methods, they have predictably reached widely varying conclusions. In approaches to Hamsun’s literature and politics, fascism has been construed in Marxist terms as an outgrowth of bourgeois ideology, or as an individual moral or psychological problem,⁵¹ or as a reactionary and anti-modern ideology nostalgic for some pre-industrial harmony.⁵² Hamsun’s enthusiastic support for Norwegian and Italian Fascism is often

⁵⁰ Larsen does mention that Norwegian leftist groups in the early twentieth century had a strong undercurrent of enthusiasm for authoritarian or anti-parliamentary means and a willingness to tolerate anti-democratic ideas. He suggests that it might be possible to approach Hamsun’s later politics from the perspective of this earlier political engagement, but he does not pursue the topic (13).

⁵¹ As Rottem observes, “vi har nærmet oss [nazismeproblematikken] på en skjev måte. Av høyst forståelige grunner er nazismen blitt framstilt som innbegrepet av det onde og det ondes vesen. Likevel innebærer dette en ontologisering av en politisk ideologi ... som er like tvilsom som forsøkene på å gi psykologiske forklaringer på nazismen” (11).

⁵² As in *Nazisme og norsk litteratur*, where the core of Norwegian fascism is described as “regressive nasjonalromantikk” (29).

neglected in favor of the more lurid question of whether he was a Nazi and when he became one.⁵³

We should recognize that fascist ideology during most of Hamsun's career was an emerging and variegated framework of cultural and political attitudes, some of which I have discussed in the introductory chapter. Keeping in mind the interpretive, chronological, and conceptual dilemmas one faces when viewing Hamsun's 1890s work in relation to fascism, in this section I briefly revisit how historians have portrayed the emergence of fascism as an ideological and cultural development, especially Zeev Sternhell⁵⁴ and, more recently, Roger Griffin.⁵⁵

Discussions of Hamsun's literature and politics often reduce the scope and variety of fascism, where it is typically seen not as an emerging cultural, ideological, and social development with pre-WWI precursors, but rather as a static ideological structure characteristic of the interwar regimes. As Larsen states in the above quotation, there is no meaningful way to talk about Nazism, and by implication fascism, with regard to pre-1918 developments. Yet, a brief glance at a guide such as Griffin's 1995 anthology *Fascism* will show that historians are indeed interested in a meaningful examination of "Pre-1918 Tributaries of Fascism" and "Pre-1914 Precursors of German Fascism" (*Fascism* 23-33, 97-103). Many histories of fascism begin with some version of a chapter on "The Cultural Transformation of the Fin de Siècle" (see Payne 23-34). Griffin even includes a section on "Non-Nazi German Fascisms" that fit his ideal-typical model of fascism as utopian nationalist palingenesis; here he includes Ernst Jünger and Oswald Spengler, two of the "reactionary modernists" discussed in Jeffrey Herf's classic study.⁵⁶

While it is reasonable to point out that fascism was not realized politically until after World War One, this interwar arrival of fascist political movements and public figures was a part of a longer cultural process that forms a crucial context for Hamsun's literature. It was not until the 1930s – and especially after his unequivocal public support for fascism was known – that 'fascist' became a category through which readers might understand Hamsun's literary texts. However, already in the 1890s, Hamsun's *Mysterier* contains crucial ideas, cultural criticism, and sentiments that were to adopt a motivating force in the fascist imagination.

⁵³ The public debates about Hamsun's political attitudes usually use the term 'Nazism,' but I find that his ideological positions make more sense in relation to a generic concept of fascism. This is also justified practically, in that 'fascism' refers to the multiple movements and regimes that Hamsun supported, including Fascist Italy, Norway's *Nasjonal Samling*, and Franco's Spain (although the latter is not always considered fascist).

⁵⁴ Although Sternhell "deliberately omits Nazism" from his consideration of fascist ideology, (a) part of my point is to understand Hamsun in relation to fascist ideology more generically, rather than as a Nazi only, and (b) other scholars, like Griffin, include Nazism as a sub-category of fascism. I am assuming the validity of an overlapping view of fascism and Nazism for Hamsun's case; the much larger question of the general validity of this view is outside the scope of this essay.

⁵⁵ Sternhell and Griffin both practice an "ideocentric" approach that is valuable for the study of intellectual fascists or writers like Hamsun, in that they attempt to comprehend the ideas that motivated fascist thinkers and to situate these ideas in relation to other currents of European culture (*Nature of Fascism* 6-7).

⁵⁶ Herf does not use the term 'modernist' in a literary/aesthetic sense, but rather in the more social-scientific sense of 'in support of modernity.' His study examines the strand of Nazi ideology that sought "a reconciliation between the antimodernist, romantic, and irrationalist ideas present in German nationalism and the obvious manifestation of means-end rationality, that is, modern technology" (Herf 1).

As described in the introductory chapter, historians often locate the intellectual or cultural roots of fascism in a heterogeneous group of individual figures from the late nineteenth century, a moment of proliferation for nationalist, racist, anti-liberal, anti-rationalist, and cultural pessimistic currents of social and cultural thought. Those interested in the emergence of fascist ideology and its cooptation of existing political and cultural positions often look to the period before the First World War and especially to the 1890s.⁵⁷ Although it was the shock and catastrophe of the First World War that hastened the rise of fascism as a political movement, this reading places greater emphasis on the fin-de-siècle crisis of civilization for understanding nascent fascist ideology.⁵⁸ As examples of this pre-fascist generation, Sternhell mentions “d’Annunzio and Corradini in Italy, Barrès, Drumont, and Sorel in France, Paul de Lagarde, Julius Langbehn, and Arthur Moeller van den Bruck in Germany” (“Fascist Ideology” 321). (Fritz Stern and George L. Mosse identified the same figures in their classic works *The Politics of Cultural Despair* and *The Crisis of German Ideology*). Each of these writers emphasized the political and social collective over the individual of liberal thought, and they also turned “against the rationalistic individualism of liberal society ... decried the life of the great cities ... and preferred the merits of instinct, sometimes even of animality” (322). His analysis describes a new intellectual climate that was formed at a broader level in the wake of individual thinkers, but he does not conflate Nietzsche or Bergson, for example, with fascist (per)versions that appear to resemble or rely on them (322).⁵⁹

In the case of Hamsun, however, the distinction between the politically acceptable author around 1900 and the fascist travesty or ‘perversion’ is much less stable. Although there is no linear and direct connection between such fin-de-siècle attitudes and fascism *in general*, Hamsun’s career shows us an individual narrative that closely parallels these historical models of fascism’s emergence. Indeed, Hamsun is peculiarly interesting as one of the few figures who participated in the fin-de-siècle transformation from which fascism was to emerge *and also* lived long enough to give his public support to the regimes that eventually implemented this new ideology. Without committing a teleological reading of this development, such historical accounts of the intellectual and cultural roots of fascism in the 1890s help reveal how Hamsun’s modernism and his later political allegiances are co-implicated.

⁵⁷ There is often a distinction made between fascism as an early ideological formation and fascism in power, as the official theory and practice of the successful regimes in Italy and Germany, or the unsuccessful political movements elsewhere. See for example Mosse: “Fascism ... did not remain static, although even some critics of totalitarian theory apparently see it as unchanging. There is, for example, a difference between fascism as a political movement and as a government in power” (Mosse 3).

⁵⁸ Sternhell claims that “the growth of fascism ... cannot be understood, or fully explained, unless it is seen in the intellectual, moral, and cultural context which prevailed in Europe at the end of the 19th century” (321). Also, like many contemporary theorists of fascism, Sternhell rejects the official Marxist interpretation of fascism and blames it for failing to perceive fascist thought as anything other than “a crude rationalization of capitalist interests” (316). Griffin helpfully summarizes some criticisms of Sternhell in *The Nature of Fascism* (6-7). Griffin calls his approach approach, like Sternhell’s, ‘ideocentric’ (7). I would argue that this is the appropriate approach for scholars of literary and cultural history, if not for all historians of fascism.

⁵⁹ As Paxton also writes, “It is wrong, however, to construct a kind of intellectual teleology that starts with the fascist movement and reads backwards, selectively, rounding up every text or statement that seems to be pointing toward it. A linear pedigree that leads directly from pioneer thinkers to a finished fascism is a pure invention” (38).

Hamsun shared fascism's counter-civilizational and anti-bourgeois ethos, which rebelled against perceived degeneration and included a utopian longing for rejuvenation. The revitalizing and regenerative component of fascist nationalism has been uniquely central in Griffin's approach to the ideology. As discussed in the introductory chapter, Griffin defines fascist ideology in terms of its core utopian myth of nationalist or ethnic renewal (palingenesis) after an era of perceived degeneration. Fascism in its different national forms offered a new idealistic and quasi-spiritual socio-political vision, which was revolutionary and utopian even as it embraced the pre-modern and the primitive as precedents for its alternative to the existing capitalist and materialist modernity.

These historical perspectives provide a needed corrective to a debate in which any deviation from a restricted model of Nazism circa 1940 is seen as evidence that Hamsun was too idiosyncratic or complicated to be understood in relation to fascist ideology. On the contrary, Hamsun's literature and ideas throughout his authorship were closely connected to the cultural and intellectual emergence of fascism, even before World War I. This does not mean that we should simply apply the epithets 'fascist' or 'proto-fascist' to his early works, but rather that we should recognize the inter-penetration of Hamsun's modernism and fascism in a way that takes into account the anti-positivist and irrationalist cultural critiques of bourgeois modernity that underlie both of them. To do so would be to recognize a historical and aesthetic problematic that is already a commonplace in certain scholarly discussions of modernism and modernity, but has been neglected in studies of Hamsun. Scholars have often insisted that Hamsun is an influential and important yet overlooked figure in the history of the modernist novel and the representation of consciousness in prose.⁶⁰ (There are no qualms about projecting backwards here.) Because of Hamsun's dual role as modernist and fascist, we should also be willing to place him in the available double context of modernism and fascism.

This contextualization should neglect neither aesthetic form nor its historical and ideological situation. The classic criticism of Marxist approaches to Hamsun's literature was that they ignored formal and aesthetic aspects of the texts. More recently, accounts of Hamsun's modernism have been enlightening when it comes to questions of literary form, but less convincing on the subject of the historical and ideological meanings or implications of the Hamsunian aesthetic. And, as I argue in the following section, Atle Kittang's influential notion that the irony, formal complexity, or 'ambivalence' of Hamsun's fictional texts nullifies or neutralizes any apparently fascist content would have to be revised if fascist ideology itself is seen as more nuanced, with a more complicated relationship to modernism/modernity.

Formalist Criticism and the "Ideology of Modernism"

The conventional view of the early Hamsun, as seen in Norwegian literary histories for most of the twentieth century, understood his texts from the 1890s as central examples of neo-romanticism (*nyromantikk*). The same works – *Sult*, *Mysterier*, and *Pan* – are now more widely considered modernist novels. This is not surprising, given that the frequency of usage as well as the historical range of the concept of modernism in literary scholarship expanded considerably in the late twentieth century. In the process of this broadening and resituating of modernism, many writers who were originally perceived

⁶⁰ See, for example, Humpál's work and also Jörg Pottbeckers, *Stumme Sprache*.

through other critical lenses are now seen as modernists. Meanwhile, ‘neoromanticism’ is not a literary historical category with great currency, especially not in English.

Hamsun’s modernism has been the subject of several key studies in postwar criticism. These include a valuable article by James McFarlane, the co-editor of the influential 1976 anthology *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature: 1890 -1930*, two Danish works from the 1970s, Kittang’s brilliant but problematic *Luft, vind, ingenting* from 1984, and Martin Humpál’s narratological investigation in *The Roots of Modernist Narrative* from 1995. A recurrent problem with conceptualizations of Hamsun as a modernist is that they neglect the question of whether and how this issue is connected to his fascism. Often, it seems to be assumed that such a question would be nonsensical to pursue, somehow excluded by the grammar of the concepts of modernism and fascism. My argument about the reactionary radicalism of *Mysterier* is intended as an alternative to the reigning formalist paradigm of modernism in Hamsun studies.

In her stimulating book on Ibsen, Toril Moi argues that Ibsen’s modernism has been overlooked on the basis of a “theoretical rigidity” she locates in the set of aesthetic assumptions that, following Fredric Jameson, she labels “the ideology of modernism” (Moi 1, 17-36).⁶¹ This term might be taken to mean the ideology of modernist texts or authors, but here it refers to a formalist critical approach that solidified itself in response to the postwar art and literature for which it was appropriate, but overstepped its limits when it came to be applied as a critical norm in the study of previous art and literature. Moi sets ‘the ideology of modernism’ in contrast to the very broad aesthetic-theoretical position of culturalism.⁶² This critical approach derives from “the ways of reading texts produced by schools and critics like the American New Critics, Maurice Blanchot, Theodor Adorno, Paul de Man, and deconstruction” (Moi 20). Going on, she describes formalists as partial to “self-referential complexity, linguistic experimentation, self-deconstructing textuality, and texts that agonize on the limits of the unsayable” (20). These aesthetic preferences all serve, in Jameson’s words, “to endow the aesthetic with a transcendental value which is incomparable” and thus in need of no contextualization within social, political, or historical formations. After Moi identifies and describes the hegemony of this set of aesthetic assumptions in the study of modern literature, she presents an alternative in her culturalist re-reading of Ibsen’s modernism.

Of greatest relevance here is the paradigmatic difference Moi describes between a formalist and culturalist critical paradigm. Perhaps she creates too rigid an opposition between the two; ‘culturalist’ approaches can certainly benefit from attention to the ways form communicates social or ideological significance, and so can ‘formalist’ approaches. Yet, in Hamsun criticism, formalist approaches have not been contextual enough in their accounts of ideology. What has the formalist optic of the critical ideology of modernism stressed about Hamsun’s early modernism, and what have its reading practices obscured? We do not need to imagine an answer to this question, because two critics representing the ideology of modernism in Moi’s book and its reception are Atle Kittang and Martin

⁶¹ See the Jameson essay “Beyond the Cave: Demystifying the Ideology of Modernism” and the more recent *A Singular Modernity*.

⁶² Moi glosses culturalism as “all the various approaches to literature and other cultural objects that reject the autonomy of art in its modernist formulation and stress the cultural, historical, social, and political aspects of aesthetic phenomena, such as Marxism, feminism, new historicism, and cultural, postcolonial, and queer studies.” (Moi 22)

Humpál, whose sophisticated readings of Hamsun through precisely this lens I will now consider.⁶³

Kittang and Humpál have both provided extended accounts of Hamsun's modernism: for Kittang, it is a modernism of ironic disillusionment and absence, for Humpál, a modernism that subverts realism's narrative codes and the official public perspective of bourgeois culture. These readings of Hamsun's modernism are both quite valuable, as I will attempt to communicate in my summaries. However, they both ignore the reactionary-radical ideological context of Hamsun's modernism in favor of less convincing notions of ideology derived from formal features of the fictional texts.

Kittang begins *Luft, vind, ingenting* by identifying some of the myths that developed in Hamsun criticism during the postwar period. He thanks Marxist ideology critique for discrediting postwar apologetic splits between the literary Hamsun and the political Hamsun, and for revealing Hamsun's continuities over time and between fiction and politics. However, he also claims that ideology critique's reading practices were "primitive" and that they simplified the ideological meanings communicated by Hamsun's fiction, making them appear too systematically coherent and harmonized.

Instead of any ideological relationship his literature has to fascism, Kittang thinks that Hamsun's *irony* is the disturbing thing – disturbing, especially, for critics who desire a reductive account of his fiction and politics. The "objectless" irony and self-deconstruction of Hamsun's texts disqualify any communication of an ideological message. Against what he calls a canonical Hamsun-construct that emphasizes his most harmonious books ("social satires like *Segelfoss By*, reactionary utopias like *Markens Grøde*, or bittersweet romances like *Victoria*") (13), and also against the homogenizing readings of Marxist ideology critique, Kittang reads Hamsun's texts as highly self-reflective, with an awareness of fiction-making that is both existential and metapoetic. Hamsun counts as a modernist author for Kittang "ikkje så mykje på grunn av sin skriveteknikk og sitt 'psykologiske' program, som på grunn av den særeigen måten romankunsten blir til sjølvrefleksjon på i bøkene hans" ("not as much on the basis of his prose technique and his 'psychological' program, as on the basis of the peculiar way the art of the novel becomes a self-reflection in his books") (28).

While Kittang's objections to Marxist ideology critique are now standard, his alternative notion that the irony and self-reflection of Hamsun's texts cancel out their ideological content is highly questionable. In Kittang's exaggerated view, the complexity of Hamsun's fictional forms makes them

noko kvalitativt anna enn formidling av (ideologiske) verdier og normer, nemleg ei utforskning av grunnleggande forhold i menneskelivet, og ei kvilelaus utprøvning av det fundamentet sjølve ditekunsten har i vår evne til (og vårt behov for) å skape fantasier, fiksjonar, illusjonar. Slike illusjonar, med andre ord, som også ideologien spring ut av. (20)

⁶³ In her book, Moi identifies Kittang's book on Ibsen as exemplary of formalist reading practices, while Humpál was a main opponent to her paradigmatic revision of modernism during her book's reception. See Moi, "Om noen reaksjoner på *Ibsens modernisme: Svar til Helland, [Wenche] Larsen og Humpál*" in *Edda*, (95, 1) 2008.

(something qualitatively different than the communication of (ideological) values and norms, namely an exploration of the fundamental conditions of human life, and a relentless testing of the foundation the art of writing itself provides for our ability (and our need) to create fantasies, fictions, illusions. The kind of illusions, in other words, out of which ideology also arises.)

Such a view credits Hamsun's ironic fiction with the capacity not only to examine fundamental existential-psychological conflicts regarding fantasy life, but also to disclose the insight that we need fiction-as-literature to understand our everyday human activities of fiction-as-fantasy and illusion-making. On top of that, Kittang suggests that Hamsun's fiction, well beyond merely transmitting ideological values or norms, in fact possesses the power of insight to unveil the psychological and existential origins of ideology itself.

As Kittang reminds the reader often, this is not a comfortable or harmonious process of insight; it is a dialectic of illusion and disillusion, of presence and absence, and above all a dialectic of lack. What I would like to emphasize here is that Kittang's readings epitomize the aesthetic-theoretical preferences of the formalist ideology of modernism, as identified by Jameson and Moi. He makes Hamsun's texts into models of formal self-reflexivity and ironic ambivalence, to which he adds the ready assumption that such self-reflexivity is incompatible with the communication of ideological norms or values. His reading of Hamsun's fiction and ideology rests on the following questionable assumptions: ironic-reflexive writing is open, complexifying, dynamic, and disturbing, while ideology (and ideological meaning) is closed, simplifying, static, and harmonious. With ideas licensed by the critical ideology of modernism, Kittang's constructs too rigid an opposition between the disruptive "ironic movement of writing" (312) and the stable communication of ideological meanings. It would be one thing to observe that the irony of Hamsun's texts is sometimes at odds with the ideological values that are also promoted in the same texts; Kittang always goes further to read ironic reflexivity as the opening and therefore the undoing of ideology. He even claims that Hamsun's literature offers "the best protection against all ideological temptations – not least those Hamsun himself fell for" ("Knut Hamsun og nazismen" 266). As Sjølyst-Jackson rightly observes, this "reductive opposition between 'literature' and 'Nazism' ... quite simply, *does not always work*" (12).

In contrast, Martin Humpál's narratological analyses of Hamsun's early novels in *The Roots of Modernist Narrative* do suggest a way of linking form and ideology, but the ideology he sees in Hamsun is a broadly anti-realist and anti-bourgeois individualism. Humpál's book seeks to provide a superior form-based justification for the use of the term 'modernist' in Hamsun's case. To this end, he reads early Hamsun as subverting the narrative forms of novelistic realism and the nineteenth-century bourgeois understandings of reason and the self that are inscribed in these forms. Drawing on Eysteinnsson's conception of modernism, he reads the narrative mode employed by Hamsun as an "aesthetics of disruption or interruption of bourgeois modernity" (Humpál 24).

In this account, Hamsun's modernist texts assert and celebrate private subjectivity and difference as incommensurable with the public culture of the bourgeois era, understood as overly committed to rationality, communicative transparency, and positivistic science. Rebelling against the rationality of bourgeois culture, Humpál's Hamsun uses fiction to present "private subjectivity in its immediacy and detailed

concreteness” in an “emancipating” fashion (40). *The Roots of Modernist Narrative* employs a generalized view of literary realism as a coercive vehicle of the bourgeois order, which is reproduced in a realist narrative mode. In this politics of form, the true critical potential of a narrative work lies not in its manifest tendencies but in the degree to which its narrative strategies disrupt the public, communicative-rational norms of bourgeois modernity.

Humpál’s analysis relies on a set of binaries opposing realism and modernism that heavily favors the latter. Realism is a coercive “expression of bourgeois reason” serving to form/educate the reader into the existing status quo (a tool of social mimesis); when it does contain “private deviations,” these are always managed by a normalizing public perspective or “metalanguage” (32-33). Modernism, in heroic contrast, scorns the “epistemological privilege” of the dominant bourgeois discourse in realist narration, making it the target of irony, parody, or other subversion, and thus it frees particular subjective or “irrational anxieties and desires” from the tyrannical control of realism’s normalizing “metadiscourse” (34). Whereas irrational subjectivity is invisible in realism, or dominated as an ‘other’ of the public reason the narrative form necessarily upholds, in Hamsun’s anarchic individualism it is presented in extended thought quotations outside the control of any narratorial metalanguage. Thus, Hamsun’s disruptive modernism is highly valorized in Humpál’s account as a defense of “private difference” in the face of its potential “usurpation by public discourses” (25). Humpál reads *Mysterier* as “modernist parody of realist narratives” that resists interpretation in terms of a realist or naturalist expectation of causal determination and coherence, and he views the narrative incoherence of the novel not a flaw, but rather an “aesthetic realization” of the novel’s main psychological theme: “the human being as an incomprehensible mystery” (75).

Such a liberation of the private and the irrational from the dominating mediation of a realist narrator can certainly be considered modernist, and Humpál’s account of it is fascinating and influential for my own reading of the narrative structure of *Mysterier*. Yet, although Humpál demonizes realism as tyrannical and shallow, he is surprisingly uncritical of Hamsun’s irrationalist modernist alternative. Hamsun’s critique of modernity is assumed to be acceptable and praiseworthy because of its transgressive nonconformism; this reading makes Hamsun’s politics seem more appealing than any realist writer’s ever could be, in that realism is affirmative of bourgeois ideology by necessity. Like Moi, I object to the understanding of realism in this ‘ideology of modernism’ perspective – to quote her defense of realism, this theory promotes “a particularly abstract formalism, which turns realism into an intrinsically reactionary and ahistorical form, thus making us quite unable to explain the difference between ... realisms” (Moi 25).

More relevantly, the celebration of modernist subversion as inherently liberating also disables us from appreciating ideological differences among modernisms. Reading Hamsun with the principle of subversion makes his modernist critique of modernity seem aligned with a generalized political stance of rebellious individualism. Humpál’s perspective elides Hamsun’s actual political position – what I have been calling a pre-fascist “reactionary radicalism” – in favor of a historically vacant, but formally subversive politics. As the narratologist Gunther Martens writes in a consideration of modernism and the politics of irony, “the characterization of modernism as ‘destructive’ or ‘interruptive’ credits texts with an inherent, but rather empty subversiveness” (101).

If principle of deviation is narratologically vague, it is also vague on the topic of the modernist text's ethical or ideological content, which is not adequately described as 'subversiveness.'

The problem with these formalist perspectives is that they give the impression of a modernism whose relationship to fascism is puzzling or oblique. Yet, the growing body of scholarship on 'fascist modernism' offers a useful foil to the separation of modernism and fascism in Hamsun studies. As discussed in the previous chapter, the notion of fascist modernism covers a diverse group of international artists and writers (Marinetti, Jünger, Benn, Pound, etc.), and it is not meant to be unitary as a stylistic or ideological template. While the label acknowledges the convergence between modernist literature and fascist ideology, it does not ignore the diversity among modernisms, fascisms, and the differing instances of their combination. In *Fascist Modernism*, Andrew Hewitt cautiously avoids suggesting a "transnational phenomenology of fascism," and he expresses due unease with "any attempt to make global claims about fascism on the basis of a literary and cultural analysis" (3). Instead, Hewitt's goal is to expand the view of "the ideological positions that both fascism and modernism can cover," an expansion that is certainly needed in Hamsun studies (4).

There have been some previous attempts to examine a connection between Hamsun's fascism and modernism. For instance, Arild Linneberg describes Hamsun as a reactionary avant-garde figure, writing that his early novels perform "a profane illumination that sets a radical spiritual freedom against the enemy: bourgeois reason" (Linneberg 8).⁶⁴ In this brief and suggestive account, Hamsun's contempt for the rationalism of existing bourgeois society finds its aesthetic expression in a "mixture of vitalism and nihilism – the blending of intense vitality and self-destruction that is found in intoxication" (9). Linneberg understands this brand of intoxication as part of Hamsun's search for something "radically other" to Enlightenment or bourgeois rationality; this search shapes Hamsun's revolutionary poetics and also informs his later fascism. More recently, Sjølyst-Jackson's *Troubling Legacies* offers sophisticated and multifaceted deconstructive readings of Hamsun's texts in terms of "migration, modernism, and fascism." Sjølyst-Jackson emphasizes Hamsun's many inconsistencies, "polyphonic resonances," and what he calls "the heterogeneous migration of [Hamsun's] oeuvre" itself (9). While my approach may focus more on continuity rather than heterogeneity, it is compatible with Sjølyst-Jackson's nuanced perspectives on both Hamsun's politics and the difficulties of reading Hamsun.

The second half of this chapter presents an interpretation of *Mysterier*. Here, I aim to describe the early Hamsun's aesthetics and ideology – his anti-realism and reactionary radicalism – in relation to the emergence of fascism and its intersections with European literary modernism as discussed thus far.

⁶⁴ Arild Linneberg, "Avantgardens Andre Ansikt: Hamsuns Poetikk" *Agora* 1/2 (1999), 8. "En profane opplysning som setter en radikal åndelig frihet opp imot fienden: bourgeoisiets fornuft."

PART TWO

A Carnivalization of the “Modern Breakthrough”

In the thirteenth chapter of *Mysterier*, the charlatan Johan Nagel hosts a drinking party for the men of the small Norwegian town where he has recently arrived unexpectedly, only to amuse and baffle the townspeople with his inscrutable behavior, stories, and opinions. Before the carousing starts, Doctor Stenersen, who is by now familiar with Nagel’s shenanigans, says to him, “jeg for min part blir ikke forskrekket over nogen ting fra Dem” (“I won’t be astounded by anything coming from you”). Nagel replies with comical understatement, “jeg er stundom litt slem til å motsi ... og iaften er jeg særlig opsat derpå” (“occasionally I have an inclination to contradict, and this evening I’m particularly bent on doing so”) (*Mysterier* 130; *Mysteries* 154). By the end of the evening, Nagel has denounced Tolstoy, altruism, Ibsen, and reigning conceptions of scientific and social progress, many of which formed a basis for Scandinavia’s “Modern Breakthrough” period of critical realism and naturalism. Carousing and drunkenness ensue, the doctor’s pince-nez is crushed, and only the logic of intoxicated disintegration prevails, as it is with the novel as a whole.

Commentators have understood *Mysterier* in terms of early Hamsun’s infatuation with the unknowable murk of the individual human psyche, often aligning it with later novels of consciousness in the Anglo-American modernist canon, or with the works of Dostoevsky.⁶⁵ The novel’s protagonist, Nagel, has become known in Hamsun criticism as an eccentric outsider who disrupts the bourgeois life of a small town. Part dandy, part nature-mystic,⁶⁶ he possesses the flair of counter-normative subversion, but also the torment of role-consciousness and self-contempt. In the course of the novel, Nagel enters several unusual and unstable relationships with the townspeople, such as his pathologically humble alter-ego Minutten and his beloved femme fatale Dagny. Here, I focus on the relationship between Nagel and Doctor Stenersen, the freethinking liberal rationalist, and I connect this to Hamsun’s anti-positivist configuration of the Doctor in the lecture “Psychological Literature.” As I will show, Doctor Stenersen functions in the character design of *Mysterier* as the primary representative of what Nagel and Hamsun consider the nihilistic falsity and dogmatic power of bourgeois and scientific rationality. (Although Nagel is not the narrator, his point of view is dominant in that he is the only character whose thought processes and internal dialogues are portrayed. In fact, I find little difference between Nagel’s ideas and those of the implied authorial perspective or the real Hamsun’s own contemporary statements.⁶⁷)

By spotlighting this antagonism between Nagel and Doctor Stenersen and linking it to the early Hamsun’s anti-realist and anti-positivist ethos, I argue that

⁶⁵ J. W. McFarlane, “The Whisper of the Blood: A Study of Knut Hamsun’s Early Novels.” *PMLA* 71, no. 4 (1956). See also the English-language biography of Hamsun: Robert Ferguson, *Enigma: The Life of Knut Hamsun* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1987), and Pottbeckers, *Stumme Sprache*.

⁶⁶ Some critics have seen Nagel as a pantheistic mystic seeking a true self in harmony with nature, outside of an alienating modern civilization and social life. Nature is seen as the site of mystical disintegration of the normal boundaries of the self, of the ‘oceanic feeling’ Freud located in religious experience or other kinds of de-individualizing moments.

⁶⁷ This does not mean, of course, that Nagel is simply a self-portrait, although Hamsun’s son Tore did suggest so (Ferguson 126). While they are certainly not identical in all respects, this analysis will treat Hamsun and Nagel somewhat interchangeably as regards their opposition to the positivist figure of the doctor.

Mysterier carnivalizes the liberalism and rationalism of the Doctor figure and the Modern Breakthrough. Going against the grain of Hamsun's own well-known attack on character typology, I view Nagel as an instance of the character type Michael André Bernstein calls the 'abject hero.' Through this carnivalization, the novel advances ideological positions that are also found in Hamsun's contemporary statements, which I will examine in "Psykologisk Litteratur" ("Psychological Literature") and "Lidt om Strindberg" ("A Bit about Strindberg"). My contextualization emphasizes the reactionary-radical ethos of Hamsun's prose modernism as it transgresses literary realism and positivism. Further, it also provides an understanding of how this early novel is related to the emergence of fascist ideology from the 1890s cultural crisis, as described above, and thus how it is related to Hamsun's later stance as a Nazi sympathizer.

Reactionary Radicalism

As Rottem suggests, Hamsun's combination of reactionary and radical elements is a crucial feature of the cultural criticism underlying his literary modernism. Hamsun's cultural pessimism and preference for the primitive or uncivilized, and also his interest in the unconscious mind, were adapted from the nineteenth century writers who were his biggest influences: Dostoyevsky, Schopenhauer, Strindberg, and Nietzsche. Of these, Strindberg was the one Hamsun actually wrote about and probably the one he read the most; for the early Hamsun, Strindberg represented a reactionary *and* anarchistic challenge to Modern Breakthrough aesthetics/politics and to the Victorian era as a whole, with its social conformism, its idolization of scientific progress and rationality, and its degenerate over-civilization.

Hamsun first described Strindberg as "reactionary and radical" in 1888 during a lecture series in Minnesota (*Svermeren* 107). In "Lidt om Strindberg," an 1894 article, Hamsun begins by praising the multiplicity and idiosyncrasy of Strindberg's interests. (In the present context, it is of less concern whether Hamsun is getting Strindberg 'right' and more important to describe the contours of Hamsun's Strindberg construction.) Hamsun admires the "Nervøsiteten, Ustadigheten i denne Bevægelse" ("the nervousity, the unsteadiness in this movement") and praises the attitude of "jubilende Raseri" ("joyous Rage") with which Strindberg approaches all sorts of artistic, scientific, and religious problems (15). Throughout the sequence of Strindberg's objects of interest, the constant has been, in Hamsun's eyes, a roving dissatisfaction with all that exists, and "Lyst til at slaa altsammen ned og ... Kræfter til at forsøge det" ("desire to knock down everything and ... the powers to attempt it") (16). This spirit of anarchistic individualism leads to no movement or school, writes Hamsun; it only awakens the admiration of a few inconsistency-loving individual followers.

Thus far, it seems that Hamsun is praising Strindberg along the lines of a Scandi-Nietzschean 'aristocrat of the spirit.' He identifies three stages in Strindberg's development, from a devout pietist to a "reaktionære Rebel." An early pietistic upbringing marked Strindberg's entire intellectual life with "den religiøse Fanatismes Hektik" ("the fever of religious fanaticism") (16). After he lost his religious faith, he turned to what Hamsun calls a "Dyrkelsen af den rene Harmoni" ("worship of pure harmony"), or aesthetic idealism as surrogate religiosity. This was a "myslykket Eksperiment" ("failed experiment") that eventually caused the reactionary rebel to awaken in Strindberg, along with a harsh rejection of beauty and art as useless idols. In

the newly anti-aesthetic phase, Strindberg was attracted to science – for Hamsun, “Tidens totale Magt, den moderne Gud” (“the total power of our times, the modern God”) – but Strindberg eventually found this just as useless as art (17-18).

Hamsun approvingly summarizes Strindberg’s view of scientific research as criminally useless; economic and social resources are diverted to scholarly research – in his mocking examples, nailing insects and naming stars, or discovering a comma in an old manuscript – while people are starving. Science is a vampire, and in view of the supposed improvements it has brought modern society, Hamsun asks whether it wouldn’t be better to have kept one’s good sight than to have invented optical lenses. In other words, technology and science are insufficient compensations for a decadent loss of natural health and vigor. Beyond doubting whether the great inventions of modern science and industry have improved life, Hamsun considers ‘progress’ bluntly as the destruction and degeneration of individual and social health. In agreement with Strindberg’s cultural-critical observations, Hamsun demonizes both science and literature as criminal luxuries that symptomatize “et galt Udviklingsspor” (“a mad path of development”) to the modern condition of *Overkultur* (22).

The key phrase “reactionary radical” enters the article as a label for this ideological position that rebels against modern progress and the hegemony of positivist science in bourgeois culture in favor of a return to nature and animality: “har Udviklingen ført Menneskeheden ind i Elendighed, skal man paa Stand gøre Tilbageetog ind i det Uudviklede!” (“if development has led humanity into misery, then one must instantly retreat into the undeveloped!”) (21). Strindberg has “Kulturfiendtlighed i Blodet” (“animosity towards culture in his blood”); he is “en vild Vekst” (“a wild growth”) whose roots are searching for soil, who calls himself “et Dyr, der længter mod Skogen” (“an animal, longing for the forest”) (22) In comments like these, Hamsun’s own counter-Enlightenment position appears more clearly: “Mennesket har efter Strindbergs Aar efter Aar gentagne Lære udviklet sig bort fra Naturen og derved løsgjort sig fra det første Grundvilkaar for en organisk Tilværelse” (“In the doctrine Strindberg has repeated year after year, humans have developed away from Nature and in so doing have severed themselves from the only basic condition of an organic existence”) (22-23). The ideology of nature Hamsun advocates involves the desire to become a wild creature again, because “ikke al Udvikling er Fremskridt” (“not all development is progress”) (25). Hamsun embraces this Rousseau-like position as “tyk, veritabel Reaktion” (“thick, veritable reaction”) – the only real cure for modernity’s degenerate individuals (25).⁶⁸

Seduced by pseudo-progress, *kultur menneske* has lost the joy and health of animal immediacy, failing to see that human consciousness is inevitably pain (30-31). Hamsun’s appropriation of Strindberg’s radical critique of *overkultur* thus includes a Schopenhauerian recognition of consciousness as misery: “Alle Folk har opfundet Bedøvningsmidler, forat slukke sin Bevidsthed; Asien sover, men Europa drikker Morfin. Ti med Bevidsthed opstaar Smærte” (“All peoples have invented anesthetics, in order to put out their consciousness; Asia sleeps, while Europe drinks morphine. For with consciousness arises pain”) (31). Strindberg is radical enough, writes Hamsun, “at foretrække (ialfald teoretisk) det vilde, ubevidste, dyriske, Liv fremfor det nuværende”

⁶⁸ It is also, unsurprisingly, a return to patriarchy: “Ved nu med Kraft og Lyst at underkaste sig Reaktionen og vende tilbage til Naturen, vilde man ogsaa kunne rette paa dette kvindelige Herskervæsen, der sammen med al Unatur forøvrigt gør Livet til en Absurditet” (30).

(“to prefer (at least theoretically) wild, unconscious, animal life over the present sort”) (30). The tragic-pessimistic insight into the inevitable pain of consciousness thus motivates Hamsun’s elevation of *unconscious* life as a way backward/forward from modern, degenerate *overkultur* toward a more vital and primitive condition. Here I would like to underscore that a key term in Hamsun’s turn to the psychological novel – *det Ubevidste* (the unconscious) – is intimately tied to his reactionary-radical stance.

Against Doctors and Detectives: Hamsun’s Anti-Realism

Hamsun’s reactionary radicalism is a neoromantic and anarchistic revolt against liberal ‘pseudo-progress’ and against the power of positivism in bourgeois culture. In *Mysterier*, many of Nagel’s speeches and actions can be understood as part of an occasionally brutal defense of the mysteriousness of nature and the human psyche, of what he calls “livets blinde kræfter” (“the blind forces of life”) against the Doctor’s rationalizing and disenchanting modernity (*Mysterier* 132). In fact, in the lecture “Psychological Literature” from 1891 (first published in 1960) Hamsun states explicitly that the doctor in his fiction represents the contemporary attitudes that he finds so limited. Here, he associates doctors not only with positivism, but also with social power and dogma.

Derfor har jeg gjerne med en Doktor i min Digtning, som skal repræsentere Videnskaben, og Doktorerne, disse Folk, der som Stand betragtet er næst Teologerne de mest dogmatiske Menneske i Samfundet, Doktorerne staar der Respekt af. Doktorerne i vor Literatur er kloge Hjærner og humane Hjærter, de har Viden om alt muligt, de er liberale om en Hals og er aldeles fortræffelige Fritænkere. Bedre Repræsentanter for Videnskaben end slige Doktorer, kan en Literatur aldrig faa. (*Paa Turné* 53)

(That’s why I like to include a doctor in my fiction, who is supposed to represent science, and doctors, these people who are as a profession the most dogmatic members of society other than theologians – there’s respect for doctors. The doctors in our literature are wise minds and humane hearts, they have knowledge about everything; they’re liberal to a fault and wholly excellent freethinkers. A literature could hardly have better representatives for science.)

Although Hamsun blames Scandinavian literary realism for portraying doctors too respectfully, we need not take this as an accurate view of the doctor in Modern Breakthrough literature, least of all in the works of Ibsen. Nonetheless, in this lecture, as in “Fra det Ubevidste Sjæleliv” (“From the Unconscious Life of the Mind”), Hamsun rebels against doctor-respecting literature in favor of a psychologically subtler and deeper subjectivist alternative. This figuration of the doctor combines progressive political and social opinions with the literary and scientific positions that appear narrow and demoralizing from an irrationalist or neoromantic point of view. Accordingly, Doctor Stenersen represents everything targeted by Hamsun’s reactionary radical revolt against the Modern Breakthrough’s aesthetic and ideological program.

As a contemporary statement of Hamsun’s aesthetic aims, “Psychological Literature” continues to cast light on *Mysterier*. The lecture’s main negative gesture is to

reject the tendentious and critical realism of the preceding period, along with the Brandesian program of debating social problems and advocating radical or progressive politics. In a not-yet-Freudian psychological move, Hamsun rejects realist characterization in favor of a view into the inner “electricity” and “nervousness” of the modern individual (*Paa Turné* 48-49). The tempo of our modern nervous life, he claims, has made us more complicated than people in Shakespeare’s time; yet the typological and shallow character psychology of our literature has not kept pace. Here, Hamsun again shows his similarity to Strindberg, echoing the latter’s attack on nineteenth century dramatic characterization in his fiery “Preface to *Miss Julie*.”

Hamsun’s bombastic and scandalous criticism of Shakespeare’s character psychology is an attention-grabbing and iconoclastic gesture reminiscent of Nagel. His repeated point is that “det modne, nervøse, forfinede Menneske er bleven et overmaade indviklet Væv af Sammensætninger ... et Væsen, som ikke paa nogen Maade kan gaa op i en Sum eller udtrykkes i en eller to særskilte Egenskabsbetegnelser” (“the mature, nervous, refined person has become an extremely intricate web of contradictions ... a being who can in no way be summed up or expressed in one or two distinct character descriptions”) (51). As a response to the complex electricity of the modern soul, Hamsun famously calls for a literature that focuses primarily on hidden interiority. This anti-typological character psychology emerges in a confrontational differentiation from realism that is also a touch defensive: “Jeg vil udstyre mine Mennesker som jeg føler Dem, og ikke som Positivismen byder og befaler” (“I will make up my characters as I feel them, not as positivism commands and orders”) (52). Rejecting the alliance of literature with shallow positivistic science – “Tidens eneste totale Magt” (“the only total power of our time”) – Hamsun claims that this science cannot explain the singular and unpredictable psychological phenomena that are most worthy of attention (53). His hostility to positivist science, however, remains more cultural-critical and attitudinal than epistemological or philosophical.

Hamsun’s plea for a superior “moderne Sjælemaleri” (“modern soul-painting”) is psychological in that it depreciates literary realism for its inability to capture the unseen life of the mind (67). The anti-positivism of “Psychological Literature” relegates facticity to merchants and capitalists, or as he suggests at one point, the mercantile aspect of our being (“mit merchantile Væsen”) (54). As a self-styled aristocrat of the spirit, Hamsun rebels against the doctrinaire superficiality of the entire positivist era, whose rationalism is condensed in the observing eye of the doctor. Hamsun defends the “Omraader i vort Væsen, som levnes uberørte af et Faktum” (“areas of our being that are left untouched by a fact”) (54). In doing so, he reveals his artistic fixation on what Robert Musil later called “the non-ratioid” – “the area of the dominance of the exceptions over the rule” and the region where “facts do not submit, laws are sieves, events do not repeat themselves but are infinitely variable and individual” (Musil 63).⁶⁹ The very form of Hamsun’s modernist novels is affected by this frantic obsession with the non-ratioid and *Erlebnis*.⁷⁰ The early Hamsun’s hostility to the doctor’s rationalist version of nature and

⁶⁹ See *Precision and Soul: Essays and Addresses*, ed. and trans. Burton Pike and David S. Luft

⁷⁰ David S. Luft suggests in his introduction to *Precision and Soul* that Musil’s distinction between “ratioid” and “non-ratioid” corresponds to Wilhelm Dilthey’s classic distinction between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*. (Musil, xxvi). For more on literature and “the non-ratioid,” see Musil’s “Sketch of What a Writer Knows” in the same volume.

human experience disrupts his narrative structures in a thrilling departure from novelistic realism.

Humpál has compellingly read *Mysterier* as an ‘anti-novel’ that subverts the logical and generic expectations of realist fiction (“*Mysterier* som antiroman”). While the novel’s first several chapters suggest a murder mystery, the novel ends with many ‘gaps,’ and any detective plot initially suggested is clearly displaced by something much more hallucinatory and vague, (somewhat like David Lynch’s *Twin Peaks*). Humpál points out that the gaps in *Mysterier* function as indeterminacies, what Roman Ingarden called *Unbestimmtheitsstellen* (“*Mysterier* som antiroman”). In typical realist fiction, these indeterminacies exist only temporarily; the inexplicable is there only to be explained in an unambiguous account of events. In Hamsun’s novel, there are indeterminacies that remain unresolvable and unknowable; this is a conscious and radical rejection of a major narrative code of nineteenth-century realism (“*Mysterier* som antiroman” 143).

Take for example what we read in the tiny final chapter of *Mysterier*. Dagny and Martha are walking home from a party together a year after Nagel’s initial arrival. Dagny says to Martha, “jeg går og tænker på alt det som blev talt om Nagel iaften. Det var meget som var nyt for mig” (“I’ve been thinking of all the things that were said about Nagel this evening ... much of it was new to me”) (235; 282) Before the reader can even pause to wonder what this new information might be, the next mystery appears. Dagny continues, “Nagel sa til mig allerede ifjor sommer at Minutten vilde komme til å ende galt. Jeg forstår ikke hvorledes han alt hadde set det da. Han sa det længe, længe før du fortalte mig hvad Minutten hadde gjort mot dig” (“Nagel told me last summer that Miniman would come to a bad end. I can’t figure out how he’d seen it already then. He said it long, long before you told me what Miniman had done to you”) (235; 282). Some scholars have taken this as a signal that Miniman raped Martha – even though the phrase “what Miniman had done to you” is ambiguous and there is no certain guarantee that rape was in fact the crime. If the reader searches earlier in the novel for a resolution, it turns out that any clues that might account for this gap are themselves confounding and ambiguous.

Indeterminacies function in *Mysterier* to deride realist models of ratiocination and to elevate Nagel’s nervous powers of intuition – in this case, his nonempirical conviction that Miniman had an evil nature of some sort (“*Mysterier* som antiroman” 143.). Nagel is an anti-Sherlock Holmes; as McFarlane notes, he renounces science and empirical fact for an alternative way of knowing that is the prerogative of the mystical mind (“Whisper of the Blood” 580). In the nineteenth century, according to the literary historian Unni Solberg, “the growth of the detective narrative was connected to the century’s trust in instrumental reason and its belief that the progress of science would offer total explanations of reality, including humans” (qtd. in “*Mysterier* som antiroman” 146). *Mysterier* rejects the positivist belief in the explicability of human behavior by mocking ratiocinative narrative. In the following section, I will further describe Hamsun’s irrationalist destruction of the realist novel by looking at the visionary and epiphanic eighth chapter of *Mysterier*, “White Nights” (*Lyse Nætter*).

Epiphany, Disintegration

In *Downcast Eyes*, Martin Jay notes “the tendency of the visionary tradition to posit a higher sight of the seer, who is able to discern a truth denied to normal vision.

Here the so-called third eye of the soul is invoked to compensate for the imperfections of the two physical eyes. Often physical blindness is given sacred significance” (12). Hamsun’s anti-rational romanticization of blindness can be seen as a secular continuation of this tendency among visionaries. In one of the many eerily beautiful incidents of fantasy, dream, or hallucination in *Mysterier*, Nagel recounts a luminous and violent fairytale to his love interest Dagny as they walk through the forest on a long Norwegian summer night. The story alternate strangely between light and dark, and it contains many motifs associated with vision and blindness. Reiterating the novel’s contrast between a natural and cultural topography, the story is told and takes place in a forest landscape markedly different from the town. Additionally, the entire scene is loaded with erotic significance; after all, Nagel is telling the story to the object of his desire.

The chapter begins during the white night of a northern summer. After a quick view of the town as “et underlig, grenet kjæmpeinsekt, et fabeldyr som hadde kastet sig flat på buken og strakt armer og horn og føletråder ut i alle retninger” (“a weird, splayed giant insect, a fabulous creature that had thrown itself flat on its belly, extending arms and horns and feelers in all directions”), the narrative turns to Nagel smoking a cigar and walking with Dagny in a mood of calm satisfaction (*Mysterier* 72; *Mysteries* 84). Soon Nagel begins to relate a fairytale he experienced, claiming that the incident occurred eight years ago, in 1883, outside of Norway. The story begins with Nagel reading by lamplight during a pitch-black night; suddenly he feels someone’s breath and hears a voice whispering for him to come. Out of nowhere appears “en liten blek mand med rødt skæg og et tørt, stivt hår” (“a pale little man with a red beard and dry, stiff, bristly hair”) (77; 90). Nagel follows the little man out into the total darkness, but loses track of him and decides to wander alone into the forest, where dewy branches and leaves begin to touch his face. Tired and wet from the dew, he lights yet another cigar and wanders aimlessly, now with the little man nearby, breathing on him constantly. A tower clock strikes midnight, and Nagel sees the little man, with two front teeth missing, glowing brilliantly: “han lyste av et forunderlig lys som syntes å være bak ham, å stråle ut fra hans ryg og gjøre ham gjennemsiktig” (“he shone with a strange light that seemed to be behind him, radiating from his back and making him transparent”) (78; 91). The sight astonishes Nagel and he turns away involuntarily, only to look back and find that the man has disappeared.

Nagel’s story continues as he moves toward an octagonal tower, still hearing the call from him to come. In the first vault of the tower he meets the little man again, who stares at him laughing, with eyes full of the many horrible things he has seen. Nagel turns to see a young woman enter. She has red hair and black eyes, and, taking a wildly glowing lantern from the little man, she walks toward Nagel and asks him where he is from. He answers that he is from the town, and she asks him to forgive her father, who is sick and mad, as shown in his eyes. The young woman has Nagel take his shoes off and leads him up into a second vault; they can still hear “den vanskapte gale” (“the deformed madman”) (79; 93). The second vault is utterly dark, and Nagel finds the bed, takes off his clothes as requested by the young woman, who then says goodnight and leaves, despite Nagel’s protests.

At this point in Nagel’s story, Dagny reacts by blushing red, her breasts heaving, nostrils quivering; she asks if the maiden left. After a seductive pause, Nagel continues, saying that now his narrative becomes “en rosenrød erindring” (“a rose-colored

reminiscence”) (79; 93). The strange shifts of light and darkness continue, as Nagel tells Dagny, “Tænk Dem en lys, lys nat” (“imagine a white, white night”) but immediately follows, “jeg var alene, mørket omkring mig var tungt of tykt som fløiel” (“I was alone; the darkness around me was thick and heavy, like velvet”) (80; 93). All of a sudden he hears the vault fill up with a rustle of noise. He waits expectantly until he experiences something that he says still intoxicates him with “en sælsom, overnaturlig nydelse” (“a mysterious, supernatural pleasure”) when he thinks of it: “en strøm av bitte små blændende væsener bryter pludselig ned til mig; de er aldeles hvite, det er engler, myriader av småengler, som strømmer ned fra oven som en skrå mur av lys” (“a stream of tiny little dazzling creatures suddenly descends upon me; they are perfectly white, angels, myriads of little angels streaming down from on high like an oblique wall of light”) (80; 94). Waves of tiny singing angels fill the vault, all of them naked and white; some of them come to sit on Nagel’s hand, and he notices that they are blind. He captures more and more handfuls of angels, noticing that all of them are blind; “hele tårnet var fuldt av blinde engler som sang” (“the whole tower was full of blind angels singing”) (81; 94). When the city clock strikes one again, the angels stop singing and fly away in a stream of light, the last ones turning back to look at Nagel, even though they are blind. Darkness ensues. Nagel later finds out that the young woman with red hair is also blind. When he returns to the forest after this magical night to look for the blind girl, he finds her crushed and dead outside the tower, the mad father pacing around and wailing, still with a horrifying gaze that sends Nagel running frightened back to the town.

This incident is certainly one of the most evocative in the novel; its resistance to decoding is part of its enthralling effect on both Dagny and the reader. What I find important is the convergence of erotic and spiritual epiphany in the forest, a natural landscape that functions throughout the novel as an alternative to the town’s social and cultural space of rationality, falsity, and conformist superficiality. While the doctor is strongly associated with the town and the faults of the modern era in his scientific approach to all phenomena, the anti-ocularcentric imagery and opacity of this story defy his worldview. Like the angels, the young woman is blind; they are denizens of a mysterious, non-visual realm of fantasy that is resistant to the doctor’s disenchanting explanations. The intoxications of the fairytale function as part of Hamsun’s poetics of the irrational, which concerns not only the inconsistent psyche, but also the forest landscape. The latter is of course a subjective, even narcissistic, dream of a landscape, containing all the torments and terrors of Nagel’s mind, but also the volatile dream of an alternative to the “total power” of the doctor.

The Hamsunian forest, as Steinar Gimnes argues, is romantic rather than rationalistic, positioned against the disenchanting Enlightenment “forest ideology,” which stripped the forest of all symbolism, reducing it to a material and utilitarian object.⁷¹ Gimnes refers to Robert Pogue Harrison’s *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, which claims that “forests represent an outlying realm of opacity which has allowed [Western] civilization to estrange itself, enchant itself, terrify itself, ironize itself, in short to project into the forest’s shadows its secret and innermost anxieties” (xi). The terror and enchantment of Nagel’s story of the blind girl in the tower are palpable enough;

⁷¹ Steinar Gimnes, “‘Det er ingen herlighet til som suset i skogen’ – Skogen som ‘stad’ i nokre Hamsun-tekstar,” (*Hamsun i Tromsø III* 174). Gimnes takes his discussion of the forest from Robert Pogue Harrison’s chapter on “Enlightenment” in *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (115-120).

moreover, the story's opacity to the positivist eye is also inscribed in its very symbolic texture, with its emphasis on distortions of and alternatives to normal vision. As Harrison also writes, "an obstacle to visibility, the forests also remained an obstacle to human knowledge and science" (10).

In terms of narrative structure, "White Nights" ruptures the prosaic world of the novel – the social life depicted in *Mysterier* and the world of the genre itself – with a moment of sacred terror and awe. This violent fairy tale acts as both an unsettling and re-enchancing force in opposition to the Doctor's bourgeois nihilism. Hamsun's reactionary-radicalism locates in this realm of sacred epiphany an antidote to the quantifications of positive science. In this respect, the disintegration of realist narrative in *Mysterier* enacts what Gianni Vattimo has called "an expression of the 'spiritual' which appears through the ruins of form" (*The End of Modernity* 37).

Nagel as 'Abject Hero'

While the "White Nights" scene shows Nagel as a storyteller within the world of the novel, his other main context of speech is dialogic. Paying attention to Nagel's role in the town's conversation structure also reveals his reactionary-radical subversion of bourgeois culture. As I argue, Nagel instantiates a preexisting character model that Michael André Bernstein has called the 'abject hero' in his book *Bitter Carnival*. Bernstein traces the development of the abject hero from its origins in the fool or slave in classical Saturnalian dialogue, through its emergence in Diderot's *Le Neveu de Rameau* and into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in two writers with whom Hamsun has frequently been compared: Dostoevsky and Celine. The Saturnalian dialogue involves "a master and his slave, a monarch and his fool, a philosopher and a madman," and it conventionally contains a reversal in which the fool appears wiser than the powerful figure who upholds the reigning norms or cherished truths of the day (*Bitter Carnival* 16). The wise fool, or licensed fool, is a conventional agent of Saturnalian reversal, pitted against a king or another powerful and influential figure. In general, this type functions as "a promising vehicle for a satiric challenge to an era's dominant values" (22). Additionally, Bernstein associates the Saturnalian reversal's momentary collapse of hierarchic distinctions with Bakhtin's carnivalesque, as a liberating destabilization of the normal distinctions.

The abject hero is a version of the fool embittered by resentment and tormented by self-consciousness about the pre-scripted role he is playing in the dialogic confrontation. Like the fool or charlatan in the Saturnalian dialogue, the abject hero carnivalizes the dominant norms and values of the era, its official wisdom, but he is tormented by his awareness of performing a role provided by a conventional model. Crucially, Bernstein's conception of abjection relies on a context of dialogue, and it is "always governed by the mapping of prior literary and cultural models." Abjection arises "in conversation with another, with a voice, whether internal or external, whose oppressive confidence arises through its articulation of the normative values of society as a whole" (29). Nagel's mind, as the reader experiences its texture through the novel's free indirect discourse and extended thought quotations, contains such 'other voices' of normative wisdom, those of Modern Breakthrough liberalism.

In the novel's first extended thought quotation, Nagel imagines himself lecturing an audience of "gentleman and ladies." Here readers witness the abject hero in dialogue

with the internalized voice of his opponent – the freethinking modern breakthrough Liberal that Doctor Stenersen eventually comes to embody. In Nagel’s imagination, or memory, the voice of a bluestocking takes offense at his disparaging remarks about the enlightened and progressive ‘great men’ of the nineteenth century (the ones whose wisdom and worldviews Hamsun attacked as superficial in his speeches). Nagel responds, “Min frue, du storeste Gud hvor det lyder halvdannet, tarvelig åndelig dannet, det De der sa. Undskyld forresten at jeg taler så direkte; men hvis De var en mand og ikke en kvinde så vilde jeg gjøre min salighets ed på at de var venstremannd” (“Great God, madam, how half-educated what you said just now sounds to me, how intellectually shabby. I’m sorry to speak so plainly, but if you were a man instead of a woman, I would say you were a liberal”) (*Mysterier* 35; *Mysteries* 37). Nagel’s response continues, first with the typically Hamsunian statement of his trust in “mit blods subjektive logik” (“my blood’s subjective logic”), and then with the claim that to educate the powerful, “de utvalgte og overlegne, herremenneskene, de store, Kaifas, Pilatus og keiseren” (“the chosen few, the masters of life, the great ones, Caiaphas, Pilate, and the emperor”) is more important than democratic progress or social improvement (35; 37). Most important for Nagel is a victory of “åndelig grundværdi” (“fundamental spiritual value”) and of “den høie mand, de høie mænd, herrerne, verdensåndene tilhest” (“the superior man, the superior men, the masters, universal spirits on horseback”) (35; 37). The diatribe ends with Nagel’s opinion that there is something greater than “creating exchange value.” In a frequently quoted passage, Nagel exclaims internally: “*mit blods røst sier at den er størst som har tilført tilværelsen mest grundværdi, mest positiv profit. Den store terrorist er størst*” (“the voice of *my* blood says that *he* is the greatest who has contributed most fundamental value, most positive profit, to human existence. The greatest one is the great terrorist”) (36; 38). Here we see a notion of “positive profit” opposed to the quantitative exchange value of modern capitalism and liberalism. The call for the great terrorist voices a desired alternative to the disparaged “great men” of the bourgeois era, such as Gladstone or Tolstoy. Some critics have claimed that this passage reveals Hamsun’s proto-fascist cultivation of the authoritarian leader.⁷² I would like to observe the dialogic situation in which Nagel expresses his irrationalist enthusiasm, whether or not we read this particular moment *alone* as a foreshadowing instance of the author’s eventual politics.

As abject hero, Nagel is in dialogue with the voice of progressive liberal culture, the freethinking Modern Breakthrough realist. Nagel’s dialogic abjection includes a sense of oppression or demoralization by a representative of social normativity and bourgeois reasonableness. In keeping with the role-consciousness of Bernstein's abject hero, Nagel is also frequently aware of his role as ‘licensed fool’ or jester in the court of Doctor

⁷² Such hero-worship of the great leader appears again outside the novel, in a poem Hamsun wrote in Paris on Christmas Day of 1893, which I have used as an epigraph in this chapter: “For nights and days I have seen it and felt it / we are levelled to the ground, all of us ... but down in the swirling masses of mankind / slumber the eternal latent powers / that are wakened to life in historic times / geniuses no one has dreamt of yet / waiting for the call from nation and people / great luminous geniuses” “I nætter og dage har jeg seet og følt det / vi nivelleres ned til jorden allesammen ... Men nede i den svirrende menneskehed / der slumrer de evige latente kræfter, / som vækkes tillive i historiske tider / genier, som ingen har anet endnu, / ventende på kaldet fra landet og folk, å store strålende genier” (quoted in Kolloen, *Svermeren*). Here Hamsun anticipates a group of elite powerful men that will emerge from masses to heed to call for redemption.

Stenersen. A scene that exemplifies both Nagel's demoralization and his role-consciousness is the Doctor's party in chapter seven. Here, Nagel initially refuses to explain a comment that Gladstone, a prominent British Liberal of the day, was a bigot. When the Doctor's wife says it would be amusing to hear him explain, Nagel responds, "If it will amuse you all, that's quite another matter," and the narrator comments: "Vilde han ved denne bemærkning gjøre en liten jeip til sig selv og sin rolle? Han fortrak munden litt" ("Did he intend, by this remark, to sneer at himself and the part he was playing? His lips curled slightly") (60; 69). This mocking smile, worthy of Raskolnikov, harbors resentment for having to perform to the applause of the "kjøtæterne" ("carnivores"), as Nagel later refers with contempt to his bourgeois audience (194; 231).

Nagel's subsequent explanation of his comment about Gladstone could be taken right out of *Notes from Underground*, a key text of abject heroism. It even contains the same example of the irrational will to deny that two plus two equals four. His denial of this fact is not literal, but is part of an effort to resist "denne rettens professionist" ("this professional of rightness") (61; 71). Nagel's blood responds to this man, whose "moral er av sundeste og varigste slag, han arbeider for kristendommen, for humanismen og for civilisation" ("morality is of the healthiest and most enduring kind... working for humanism and civilization") with a feeling of vague injury and of being trivialized (61; 71). Doctor Stenersen, frustrated by Nagel's underground discourse, shouts, "Jeg har Gud strafe mig aldrig hørt maken til nonsense! ... Oprører det Dem at Gladstone altid har ret?" ("I'll be damned, but I never heard such nonsense in my whole life! Does it offend you that Gladstone is always right?") (61; 71). In response, Nagel smiles a smile of "sagmodighet eller ... affectation" ("meekness or affectation") – the narrator cannot tell. Then he says, "det oprører mig ikke, det demoraliserer mig heller" ("it does not offend me, rather it demoralizes me") (61; 71). Here, Nagel admits to his abjection in the face of 'rightness' and factuality, as when he faces the Doctor's causal and materialist explanation of natural phenomena, or the Doctor's overbearing reasonableness.

Nagel's role-conscious sneer at his own performance and his affectation in response to the Doctor reveal another feature entailed by Bernstein's notion of abjection: an obsessive theatricality (*Bitter Carnival* 92). *Mysterier* is indeed a novel preoccupied with theatricality and falsity, both voluntary and involuntary. Consider for example Nagel's captivating violin performance at the bazaar, which he afterwards passes off as false and inauthentic, or the darkly comic scene of Nagel's unwittingly histrionic pseudo-suicide. Nagel is obsessively aware of potential falsity in social interaction, although he tries to persuade himself that he is adept at exploiting this potential. His awareness of deception is also present in introspection, in his frequently observed internal masking and the groundlessness of his psyche and motivations. Although Nagel fantasizes immersion in nature as a liberation from the theatricality that accompanies self-consciousness and self-representation, and he even tries to convince Martha to marry him by depicting such an Edenic paradise, he is tortured by the recognition that this dream is also a sham. This is the sort of dialectic of illusion/fiction and self-undercutting disillusionment that Kittang finds important in his readings.

Rather than providing a stable foundation, nature itself is theatricalized in *Mysterier*. In one of the novel's final thought quotations, Nagel fancies that he experiences mystical knowledge of "den uendelige sammenheng i tingene" ("the infinite interconnectedness of all things"), a vision "tilbunds i alt" ("to the bottom of everything")

(198; 236). However, this illumination is immediately undercut by his recognition that everything is a farce, “alt hvad jeg ser og hører og fornemmer er bedrag, ja selve himlens blå er ozon, gift, snikgift” (“everything I see and hear and perceive is a fraud, even the blue of the sky is ozone, poison, insidious poison”) (198; 236) Nagel’s train of thought moves with startling haste from a mystical recognition of the ground of all things to the realization that this ground itself is a mask or curtain to be pulled away. Nature then appears to him as the ultimate sham and deception; the only option left after this radical skepticism is an aestheticist delight in falsity, as Nagel dreams of a quiet journey in his sailboat of aromatic wood through this “blå, bedragersk ozon” (“fraudulent blue ozone”) (198; 236). In this voluntary preference for fantasy or the fictional, critics such as Rottem have read a Nietzschean moment of aesthetic redemption or justification of inauthentic existence: “opp mot tilværelsens løgnaktighet og bedrag setter nemlig Nagel bevisst sine egne ‘løgner’: fiksjonens falskmyntneri, kunstens illusjoner” (“against the falsity and deception of existence, Nagel consciously sets up his own ‘lies’: the false currency of fiction, the illusions of art”) (88).

In his abject discourse, Nagel voices the content of Hamsun’s modernist irrationalism: the worship of the chosen few, the preference for the inexplicable ‘dark forces of nature,’ the subjective logic or whisper of the blood, the irrelevance of a truth/lie distinction, and the preference for ‘fundamental value’ above quantitative exchange value. In his dialogue with the representatives of bourgeois modernity, Nagel speaks a discourse that, like the Underground Man’s, subverts the eudaimonistic and progressive social goals of nineteenth-century liberalism. Nagel has much in common with many other figures of modernist literature who reject what Lionel Trilling, in “The Fate of Pleasure,” called the “specious goods of pleasure” in bourgeois society, with its shallow consolations and deluded unawareness of the psychological self-laceration that, in Hamsun, is the distinction of a superior individual (*Beyond Culture* 76). In opposition to the superficial and false culture, Nagel offers the sensuous and primitive brutality of Dionysian suffering; yet, he too is fraudulent – a “charlatan” and liar from the first moment the reader meets him.

The rhetoric of Saturnalian reversal in *Mysterier* pressures the reader to identify at least intellectually with the abject hero, the figure of subversion and depth, rather than with his opponent, the shallow voice of prosaic rationality. Bernstein’s observation about this general tendency in the Saturnalian confrontation is striking when applied to Hamsun’s novel: “we find ourselves expected to have an identificatory sympathy with whichever voice claims to embody anarchy and rebellion, the voice that strives to topple normative or prudential reasoning” (*Bitter Carnival* 159). But despite the way the novel’s rhetoric orients the reader, our knowledge of the reactionary-radical politics of Hamsun’s irrationalism should limit our consent. Even in the narrative outcome of Hamsun’s novel, the Saturnalian reversal is not a solution to the crisis it enacts in bourgeois culture. The protest ends with the abject hero’s intoxicated and suicidal disintegration in the grip of the very “blind forces of nature” whose power he extolled, and the townspeople are left to contemplate the strange combination of therapy and terror produced by his destabilizing transgressions.

Hamsun's Modernism and Fascism

“Truth often conceals itself best in restless confession. There’s nothing that makes the judge so confused and suspicious as meeting himself in the accused. Hamsun beat everyone to the punch; he told his entire story in advance, revealed himself, and called it *Mysterier*.”

– Aasmund Brynildsen, “Svermeren og hans demon”⁷³

Hamsun’s modernist critique of bourgeois modernity eventually finds its home in fascism, the only major political ideology to emerge out of Europe’s fin-de-siècle crisis of culture. In the clever comment above, Aasmund Brynildsen may exaggerate the degree to which *Mysterier* reveals Hamsun’s political career in advance. Brynildsen, in a series of brilliant postwar essays, described Hamsun’s cult of the unconscious, the natural, and the primitive as part of an idealist-romantic tradition. He argued that Hamsun’s entire authorship displays a reactionary-utopian and anti-humanist nature romanticism that makes his path to fascism comprehensible.⁷⁴ As he reflects in a 1962 essay, “it was naïve [of Hamsun] to believe that German Nazism actually was to be a political instrument for this romantic reaction” (62).

As I have argued here by stressing Hamsun’s reactionary-radical carnivalization of realism and positivism, *Mysterier*, despite its early date, is quite revealing for understanding the author’s later politics. To recognize this connection does not entail any historical claims of inevitability or aesthetic claims that Hamsun’s modernist works express some supposedly fascist or Nazi style. On the contrary, the German National Socialists were not interested in Hamsun’s modernist texts (Goebbels is an exception here), but rather in his later realist novels, his Scandinavian and peasant heritage, and his easily exploitable literary renown (König 32). So, while it is quite misleading to label *Mysterier* “fascist literature,” one can nonetheless discern the continuities between Hamsun’s literary modernism and his fascism. With Griffin, we can understand the “common matrix” of modernism and fascist ideology as a response to the malaise of modernity felt in the early twentieth century due to social, cultural, and intellectual changes accompanying modernization. Hamsun’s modernist texts expresses a deeply

⁷³ “Sannheten skuler seg ofte best i den restløse bekjennelse. Det er intet som gjør dommeren så forvirret og så mistenkelig som å møte seg selv i den anklagede. Hamsun kom alle og enhver grundig i forkjøpet; han fortalte hele sin historie på forhånd, åpenbarte seg og kalte det *Mysterier*” (Brynildsen 7).

⁷⁴ In one of Brynildsen’s many perceptive formulations, he writes: “Hamsun hated the materialist worldview, not because of any experience of spiritual realities, but due to a purely psychological (*sjelelig*) reaction ... a hatred that is perhaps more dangerous than even the most fanatical materialism, because it leads to an even deeper depreciation of humanity: the hatred of humanity’s delusions in the end becomes a hatred of humanity itself, the struggle against the fall of thought becomes a struggle against thought, and in this way reaction takes on the character of radicalism. Every reaction against the materialistic worldview that does not originate from a will to knowledge as conscious as the one behind this very worldview is as dangerous as it is fruitless” (33).

(“Hamsun hatet det materialistiske verdensbillede, ikke ut fra noen opplevelse av åndelige realiteter, men ut fra en rent sjelelig reaksjon ... et hat som kanskje er farligere enn noen enn så fanataisk materialisme, fordi det leder til en enda dypere nedverdiggelse av mennesket: hatet til menneskets villfarelse blir til sist et hat til mennesket selv, kampen mot tankens fall blir til en kamp mot tanken, og således overtar reaksjonen radikalismens karakter. Enhver reaksjon mot det materialistiske verdensbillede som ikke fremspringer av en like bevisst vilje til erkjennelse som den dette billede selv er runnet av er like så farlig som ufruktbar.”)

troubled literary and aesthetic response to these conditions of modernity, fantasizing alternatives located in primitive, unconscious, or intoxicated experience. In the attitudes communicated by its abject hero as well as its anti-realist narrative form, *Mysterier* exemplifies key aspects of early fascist ideology, particularly its negations – its rejection of liberalism and parliamentary democracy (which was first instituted in Norway in 1884), its anti-bourgeois and romantic anti-capitalist stances, and its anti-positivism and irrationalism. Later in his career Hamsun’s non-fictional texts build off of this ideological foundation to express fascism’s bellicose and youth-obsessed discourse – as well as its preoccupation with Europe’s degeneration and rebirth, as Monika Žagar shows.⁷⁵ Though it was not a foregone conclusion, Hamsun’s fin-de-siècle faith in the blood’s subjective logic later grew into a revolutionary devotion to pan-Germanic redemption.

⁷⁵ See Žagar’s instructive chapter on “Imagining Degeneration and Revolution” (181-210)

Chapter Three Åsmund Sveen's Rite of Spring: Erotic Vitalism and Fascism

“There's something rotten about the older generation, with all their effort to keep things out of sight and cover things up. The naked and pure are the healthiest.”
– Åsmund Sveen, 1933⁷⁶

In “George Orwell and the Politics of Truth,” Lionel Trilling admires Orwell for refusing “to be illusioned in any way he could prevent” and observes that “even an idealistic politics, perhaps especially an idealistic politics, can pervert itself” (Trilling 409). This pithy remark by a cautious observer of the “bloody crossroads” of politics and literature has a double relevance for the case of Norway's forgotten queer modernist poet Åsmund Sveen. Certainly, Sveen liked to think of his politics as ‘idealistic’: he justified his work for Norway's fascist party during the Nazi occupation as part of a historically destined idealism that would supersede rationalist and materialist modernity (“Hvorfor”). Also, the suggestion of political ‘perversion’ carries a sexual connotation, allowing us to recall that Nazism has often been imagined as erotically distorted, abnormal, or repressed. Susan Sontag states in her well-known article “Fascinating Fascism” that there is a “natural link” between fascism and sadomasochism (103). Other postwar discussions have drawn a problematic connection between homosexuality and fascism with surprising frequency.⁷⁷

Although this chapter explores how Sveen's poetic eroticism and his fascist politics are entwined, I will avoid prejudicial clichés about the sexual orientation of Nazism. Dagmar Herzog addresses this problem directly in *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany*.

In a ... climate characterized both by historical ignorance and persistently lingering homophobia, it has been an arduous and delicate matter for scholars [to address] not only the lethal homophobia that came to characterize Nazism but also the attraction that the Nazi movement could initially have exercised also for some homosexual men. (12-13)

Åsmund Sveen's attraction to National Socialism in Norway and Germany should be understood from a perspective that recognizes the ultimately anti-gay nature of fascism while also considering why it could have appealed to his poetic and erotic imagination. While this analysis does not discount Sveen's eroticization of fascism, I will stress that it was not an exclusively gay phenomenon – this type of eroticization “can be found in all sexes and sexual orientations” (Lubrich 11-12). To that end, the present chapter situates Sveen's eroticism culturally and historically, showing that his vitalistic and mystical lifeview was of greater relevance to his misguided political allegiance than his personal sexual orientation. Vitalism, a somewhat neglected but important concept of early twentieth-century aesthetics and literature, overlapped both with Sveen's fabrication of a

⁷⁶ The original: “det er noko skite ved den gamle generasjonen, dette strevet deira med aa løyne burt og klæ paa. Det nakne og reine er det friskaste” (Gatland 75)

⁷⁷ See the discussion below of Hewitt, *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism, and the Modernist Imaginary*, and Frost, *Sex Drives: Fantasies of Fascism in Literary Modernism*.

spiritual eroticism that included same-sex desire and with the anti-rationalist basis of his fascism.

In the 1930s Sveen was poet and critic writing in *nynorsk*, a gay man living in Oslo with his partner (a photographer), and a self-identified pacifist with an interest in what we would now call new-age spirituality. Acclaimed as an important voice of literary modernity, a “bold and strange talent,” Sveen was received enthusiastically by influential figures such as the novelist and champion of psychoanalysis Sigurd Hoel, who was his publishing consultant at Gyldendal (Gatland 57).⁷⁸ Beginning in 1932 with his first collection, *Andletet* (The Face), Sveen’s expressionistic and sun-worshipping poems alternate between ecstatic awakenings into sensual pleasure and disturbing, even violent, darkness. Three poetry collections – *Jordelden* (Earth Fire), *Eros Syng* (Eros Sings), and *Såmannen* (The Sower) – followed over the next eight years, as well as one novel (*Svartjord*) and one lost novel, which was not published because Hoel found its depiction of its homosexual characters insufficiently psychoanalytic. For Hoel, who was married to a psychiatrist and whose cultural radicalism was influenced by Wilhelm Reich’s blend of Marxism and psychoanalysis, Sveen’s novel did not conform to a proper ‘social’ and ‘psychological’ treatment of the topic of homosexuality. He criticized the novel for representing “what we could call delayed puberty fantasies” in a style that he compared to the worst fin-de-siècle romanticism (see Gatland 96). Hoel’s description makes it sound like Sveen’s novel was written in a Decadent tradition of excessive ornament, impressionistic moods, and focus on exquisite surfaces – quite different from his own pared-down, ‘masculine’ style and his demand for a fictional portrayal based on prevalent models of ‘deep’ character psychology.⁷⁹

At its best, Sveen’s poetry blends the pantheistic and the erotic in intense images and captivating verse. While it was admired for its novelty, Sveen’s work also shows the disparate influences of both Sufi mysticism and the traditional rural songs (*bygdeviser*) he published with his formally innovative poems. Ultimately, Sveen’s literature was overshadowed by his unexpected commitment to National Socialism, which prevented him from publishing any of his complicated and troubling post-war work until *Brunnen* (The Well) appeared in 1963, the year he died, followed a few years later by the highly regarded volume *Tonemesteren* (The Master of Tones).

Sveen’s status as a “marginal and not very widely read Norwegian poet” whose work has been called “one of the best-kept secrets of Norwegian literature” does not exactly position him as the object of abundant international interest (Vassenden 282; Ødegård). Yet, his importance in the context of a “vitalist-expressionist-modernism” is increasingly recognized by Norwegian scholars (Karlsen 15). In addition, his fate as the openly gay *nynorsk* modernist who became a cultural bureaucrat in Norway’s *Nasjonal Samling* is quite relevant to recent discussions of modernism, fascism, and modernity, as presented in the introductory chapter. Meanwhile, the ongoing “diversification of modernist studies” has inspired interest in geographically, sexually, or linguistically

⁷⁸ The critic Rolf Thesen called Sveen “eit djervt og merkeleg talent” (“a bold and strange talent”) in a review of *Andletet* in *Arbeiderbladet*, quoted on the back of *Eros Syng*.

⁷⁹ Hoel wrote his own novel about the younger generation’s erotic liberation, the delightful early work *Syndere i sommersol* (Sinners in the Summer Sun, 1927). After participating in the Resistance and fleeing to Sweden during the occupation, Hoel also wrote an important novel about resistance and collaboration in wartime Norway, *Møte ved milepelen* (Meeting at the Milestone, 1947). See Øystein Rottem’s 1991 biography, *Sigurd Hoel – et nærbilde*.

marginal and overlooked writers.⁸⁰ But rather than simply recuperating Sveen as a forgotten modernist or as a bold poet of the (homo)erotic, I address these dimensions of Sveen's work in connection to, and in tension with, his eventual collaboration with the cultural vision of Nazism in Norway. Sveen is relevant today not only as a poet whose work might provide a curious sort of aesthetic enjoyment, but also as a figure who confronts us with an unusual constellation of homosexuality, vitalism, and fascism.

In poetry and politics, Sveen sought a transition to a healthier and liberated sexuality, to the "wild spring" he exalted in *Andletet*, which was to replace the repressed libidinal structures of a bourgeois civilization in decay. Understanding how Sveen's erotically expressive vitalism was connected to his National Socialist allegiance may require modifying received assumptions about the regime's sexual puritanism.⁸¹

Although German fascism is often construed both by scholars and in the popular imagination as the epitome of sexual repression, Herzog's recent work has argued that it also had a contrary sexual profile, in that it "perpetuated and intensified certain aspects of the sexually liberalizing tendencies underway since the early twentieth century" (Herzog 5). In addition to seeing National Socialism as an anti-rationalist, anti-materialist form of idealism destined to save Europe, Sveen also saw the movement as compatible with his own open, modern, and 'spiritual' attitude towards the erotic. *Sex After Fascism* shows how this recognition was possible, by revealing neglected aspects of Nazi thinking about sex and love. In addition, Herzog argues that the erotic in secular modernity functioned as a substitute for traditional religion and that National Socialist views of sexuality reflect this larger cultural shift (32-33). I will return to these rather complicated issues below in connection to Sveen's vitalism and his cult of Eros.

The main literary text in this analysis is the poem "Til dei unge menn" ("To the Young Men") from *Såmannen* (The Sower, 1940), in which the speaker fantasizes a spiritual and erotic utopia of masculine virility. In this poem, Sveen's understanding of contemporary history as a narrative of fascist regeneration after bourgeois decay accompanies his erotic vitalism. While my reading of "Til dei unge menn" examines the poem's erotic cult of masculinity, I reject the claim that Sveen's homosexuality provides a compelling 'explanation' for his fascism.⁸² As we will see, Sveen's mystical and vitalistic discourse of masculinity, and not simply his sexual orientation, supplies the link between his eroticism and his political ideology. In fact, Sveen's worship of regenerative, procreative, and 'functional' male sexuality at times seems to go against his own non-reproductive sexual desire. It is useful, therefore, to notice the following tension in Sveen's erotic vitalism: on one hand, there is a sexual vitalism of biological reproduction and natural fertility (which is inherently heterosexual and closer to the Nazi sexual ideology described by Herzog), and on the other, there is the vitalistic praise of erotic desire as an indication of life and vigor (which can include nonprocreative same-sex desire).⁸³

⁸⁰ Stephen Ross refers to the "diversification of modernist studies" in the introduction to *Modernism and Theory*; he also writes that the turn to thinking about modernisms in the plural has "reopened modernism to a more comprehensive gaze" (1).

⁸¹ For example, Sontag asks in her influential article on Leni Riefenstahl, "Why has Nazi Germany, which was a sexually repressive society, become erotic?" (102).

⁸² See Imerslund 197-198, discussed below.

⁸³ Vassenden offers some interesting commentary on this tension in Sveen's work in relation to a later poem from *Brunnen* ("Sol og Skygge" 58-59)

Nature, Sex, and *Andletet*

Sveen requires a longer introduction than Knut Hamsun or Rolf Jacobsen; the basic facts about his literature and politics are largely unfamiliar even to Norwegian readers. The Norwegian scholar Jan Olav Gatland's 2003 biography, *Det andre mennesket: Eit Portrett av Åsmund Sveen*, directed new attention to Sveen's poetry and his miserable fate, and it offers a wealth of personal, literary, and historical details and documents. The reasons provided by Gatland to explain Sveen's turn to fascism include his positive experiences in Germany in 1934; his political naiveté or ignorance of the implications of his decisions; his romantic nationalist values; and his economic concerns or opportunism. Like Hamsun, Sveen was a writer of many apparent paradoxes; both his poetry and his politics were heterogeneous to the point of incoherence. Gatland sketches him as a romantic pacifist, an apolitical but basically social-democratic thinker, and a homosexual poet mysteriously seduced by fascist ideology, but never genuinely engaged by it ("Opportunist" 245). In 1937, for instance, Sveen published a pacifist poem called "Jord og blod og ære" ("Earth and Blood and Honor") in *Dagbladet*, the leftist paper for which he wrote literary reviews. (*Dagbladet* would later be a primary force against Sveen during his post-war trial and punishment for treason.) Here, Sveen mocked the militaristic call for 'blood and honor' from the Third Reich. Why, one wonders, did this leftist-pacifist poet end up greeting the Nazi occupation as a willing collaborator with their cultural and ideological mission? Gatland ultimately sees Sveen's turn to Nazism as more opportunistic than idealistic, but I doubt that this difference is so clear cut (245). Without sacrificing an awareness of the multiple practical pressures and motivations, I would emphasize Sveen's utopian vitalism, which he expressed in his modernist poetry and saw as compatible with European fascism.

When the young Sveen moved to Oslo from his region of Elverum in the late 1920s, he initially shared a room with the then-unknown painter Kai Fjell, whose combination of expressionism with traditional folk motifs might be compared to Sveen's poetic output. By the end of the 1930s, he had become an acclaimed figure in Norwegian literature and a respected literary critic, and he was about to publish his fourth collection of poetry, *Såmannen* (Gatland 139). In a twist that surprised his family and undermined his future, Sveen joined Quisling's *Nasjonal Samling* party in November 1940 – half a year after the Nazi invasion (143). Throughout the war, Sveen worked as a cultural administrator and theater director for the *Nasjonal Samling* government. He was thus able to wield significant influence on the cultural projects and programs that were part of Norwegian fascism, most notably by constructing the fascist literary canon in the anthology *Norsk ånd og vilje* (Norwegian Spirit and Will).

These developments appear especially surprising given that Sveen was located on the political left in the thirties and that he wrote boundary-breaking poetry that did not fit the artistic vision of the *Nasjonal Samling*. In their view of art and culture, the party wished to promote the 'healthy' and to forbid degenerate, insufficiently nationalist, or communist expressions. The party's program from 1933 stated that "Press, theater, broadcasting, film, and other organs of culture must advance the interests of the nation. Antisocial propaganda and the spreading of class hatred are forbidden" (qtd. in Birkeland 10). But while Sveen's authorship was not typical of this vision, it was also not wholly at odds with the nationalist rhetoric of health, nature, and origins. Sveen's poetry collections

were hybrids of the transgressive modern and the traditional, containing expressionistic homoeroticism as well as folk ballads. As “Til dei unge menn” will make clear below, a central and counterintuitive aspect of Sveen’s story is that the ‘degeneracy’ of homoerotic desire was included in his imagination of ‘pure’ Norwegian nature and nationalist social and ethnic revitalization.

One of the Norwegian scholars to have written at length about Sveen calls his case “one of the strangest and sorriest” among the collaborators who were tried for treason after World War II (Imerslund 160). Sveen’s sentence for treason included over four years of forced labor and the forfeit of his civil rights. The court described him as “moderate,” not ill-willed, but still guided by a deep conviction; they also pointed out that he should have known better given his intellectual talents and status in the literary culture (“Opportunist” 236). Sveen wasn’t disturbed by losing his right to vote, however; he wrote, “jeg har dømt meg selv til livsvarig taushet i politiske spørsmål, det skjønner jeg meg åpenbart ikke noe på” (“I have condemned myself to lifelong silence about politics, I obviously don’t know anything about it”) (Gatland 164). It is easy to concur with this self-judgment – it is not an apology or exculpation – because the motivations for Sveen’s politics were not political, at least not in a limited sense. Sveen, like other fascist or conservative-revolutionary thinkers, was motivated by grandiose cultural perceptions involving the decline of ‘soul’ in the modern age and the need for cultural-spiritual (*åndelig*) revitalization at both a national and continental level. Sveen also voiced fears of racial decline and imagined rebirth in terms of a mythic biological and cultural purity (“Hvorfor”).

The somewhat Kafkaesque postwar poetry in *Brunnen* and *Tonemesteren* certainly merits the attention of the literary historian of Scandinavian modernism, but the present analysis limits itself to Sveen’s work from the thirties – *Andletet*, *Jordelden*, *Eros Syng*, and *Såmannen*. As Gatland writes, “dikta frå 1930-åra, dei må fram i lyset att, fordi dei er modernistiske, og fordi dei er erotiske” (“the poetry from the 1930s must come to light again, because it is modernist, and because it is erotic”) (12). Sveen’s poetry is considered modernist in that it eschews traditional lyrical structures and forms in a way that was perceived as an innovation in the *nynorsk* tradition and in Norwegian poetry more generally. He denigrated the expressive capacities of “eit stivt skjematisk vers” (“a rigid, schematic verse”) and preferred instead “rimlause, rytme frie former” (“rhyme-free, rhythmless forms”) (60). Additionally, Sveen’s work expresses a rejection of conservative sexual morality that was an important feature of the modernist turn against bourgeois values. Sexual liberation movements and youth movements of the early twentieth century often saw themselves as a return to a natural morality that was less bound by the hypocrisy and decorum of the older generation.⁸⁴ As Modris Eksteins remarks in *Rites of Spring*, “Artists used sex to express their disillusionment with contemporary values and priorities and, even more, their belief in a vital and irrepressible energy” (83).

The erotic attitude of Sveen’s poetry is ecstatic and rapturous, resembling a Whitmanesque celebration of the body and senses, although there are also moods of extreme disharmony and neurotic self-torture. Matter and spirit merge in Sveen’s expressionistic landscapes; the typical Sveen poem from the thirties presents intensely

⁸⁴ This demand for honesty about sex and the body, as opposed to the older generation’s hypocrisy and veiling, is also the target of Hoel’s light irony in *Syndere i sommersol* (Sinners in the Summer Sun, 1927).

resonant and stylized nature imagery, pervasive and often masochistic eroticism, and frequent references to glowing sunshine and the vibrations of the forest. For example, consider this hypnotic and panerotic section of *Andletet*. (A literal translation follows.)

Varmedirrande
vill står skogen.
Glødd i solglo
og brend i solbrand –
med brusande bras
av barlaug og lauvbragl
og gnistrande greiner
i hungrig hete.

Lynblenkblakrande
blikrar lauvet.
Solskinsilande
vingjer greinene.
Kvåesveittande
brunkar borken
innmillom moldtunge
skuggar i barhanget ...

Eg bøyger armen
mot bjørkegreina,
eg bender halsen
attende i møsen,
eg krøkjer kroppen
i krevjande solgir
eg vrid meg naken
i vaken ørske.

Eg vrid meg naken
og solgiren tek meg,
eg opnar fanget
og opnar munnen.
Eg krøkjer kroppen –
og krafter fløymer
og safter strøymer
or livsens røter.

Eg bøyger armen,
og bender halsen
og brenner munnen
mot berre steinar.
Eg stryk min lekam
med heilage kvister,

og strekkjer meg djupt
i det varme jordfang.
(*Andletet* 56 -58)

(Warm-vibrating / wild is the forest. / Glowing in sunshine / and burning in sun's fire – / with a roaring rush / of spruce and glimmering greenery / and flashing branches / in hungry heat. // Lightning bright shining / rustling leaves. / Sunshine-filtering / swinging branches. / Resin-sweating / the trunk darkens / between soil-heavy / shadows of hanging spruce // ... I bend my arm / toward the birch branch, / I bend my neck / back in the moss, / I curve my body / in aching sun-lust / I strip naked / in a waking daze. // I strip naked / and sun-lust takes me, / I open my arms / and open my mouth. / I curve my body – / and forces flood / and juices flow / from the roots of life. // I bend my arm / and bend my neck / and scorch my mouth / on bare stones. / I stroke my body / with blessed branches, / and stretch deep / in the warm earth's embrace.)

Indeed. It has often been suggested that *nynorsk* has greater resources than *bokmål* for the creation of evocative nature poetry, with more precise shadings and a wider landscape vocabulary; Sveen wrote that bokmål was not capable of providing “de typiske norske naturbetegnelser” (“typically Norwegian descriptions of nature”) (Gatland 19).

While exceedingly eroticized, Sveen's landscapes also possess a clearly pantheistic or nature-mystical dimension. Such a worshipful attitude towards the sun and forests is found in the works of many twentieth-century Norwegian writers, although it is not always as red-hot and passionate as in Sveen. The Marxist tradition of ideological criticism tends to associate nature worship with fascism or reactionary discontent with the social. For instance, Leo Löwenthal's seminal Marxist reading of Hamsun's novels presented nature mysticism as part of a proto-fascist mindset, as did the Danish authors of *Det reaktionære oprør* (The Reactionary Revolt), who cited Hamsun's ‘irrationalist naturalism’ as an ideologically suspect feature of his fiction. However, it is important to recognize that Norwegian nature mysticism, like artistic vitalism in general, has a broader array of ideological ramifications. As Monika Žagar has observed, mythical reverence for nature is a traditional Scandinavian attitude that was utilized by Nazism for its own purposes: “Nazi propaganda exploited and lauded the Nordic/Germanic link to Nature as a sign of primordial vitalism” (Žagar 206). Thus, while nature worship or vitalism is not automatically fascist in every case, it was by the thirties an important part of fascist iconography and discourse.

The Face consists of fifty-seven untitled poems in three sections. Hoel interpreted *Andletet* as a single poem cycle with a therapeutic narrative that he likened to the psychoanalytic progression through uncomfortable insight towards health. The two poles of experience for the speaker in the poems are blissful erotic union (with nature or with people) and harsh alienation (from nature and from others). After the initial sections describe the young man's erotic unity with “wild spring,” there follows a stage of crisis, fear of annihilation and suicide, and a growing awareness of bisexuality. Imerslund also reads *Andletet* psychotherapeutically, “som et uttrykk for et ungt menneskes oppvåkning til bevisstheten om at han har en avvikende seksuell legning” (“as an expression of a young man's awakening consciousness of his deviant sexual orientation”). He

emphasizes the themes of narcissism and the death wish; the speaker's "intense selvbeskuelsen [er] et resultat av følelsen av annerledeshet ... tanken på døden stadig dukker opp, døden som en forløser og en befrier" ("intense self-contemplation [is] a result of the feeling of being different ... The thought of death shows up constantly, death as a redeemer and a liberator") (Imerslund 169). The young man emerges from the crisis of narcissism, however, with an affirmative view of existence justified by the presence of divine beauty and sacred Eros. Incidentally, Hoel found this pantheistic resolution to be a flaw in the collection's otherwise remarkable and visionary poetry (Gatland 58).

Sveen's homoeroticism, as seen in poems about male romantic friendship or loving addresses to a second person, was new in the *nynorsk* poetic tradition. However, the literary thematization of same-sex desire was not unexampled in Norway at this time. Depictions of homosexuality appeared in several *bokmål* novels around 1930, including Cora Sandel's *Alberte og Friheten*, Rolf Stenersen's *Godnatt da du*, and Gunnar Larsen's *I Sommer* (74). In the wake of such representations of 'perverse' sexual proclivities, the early thirties witnessed a renewed moral debate centered on homosexuality, a topic that was largely excluded from the Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough's famous *sedelighetsdebatt* ('debate about [sexual] morality') in the age of Ibsen. For example, Stenersen's novel was attacked in an article called "En skitten strøm flyter utover landet" ("A Dirty Stream is Flowing over the Land") (55-56).

Unafraid of such a reaction, Sveen showed his boldness by having the speaker in his poems engage in sexual activities with partners of both sexes or of indeterminate sex. He exploited linguistic ambiguities, employing the masculine *nynorsk* pronoun to create a homoerotic connotation, and "to play a bit with the reader," as Gatland notices (87). In the following excerpt from *Andletet*, the pronoun "han" refers to its antecedent "vårdagen" ("spring day"), but Sveen is also using it to describe an erotic encounter with a man.

Vårdagen – villande vårdagen lær
 imot meg frå alt som eg kjenner!
 Han femner meg fast – og han tek meg og bær
 på sterke, ustyrlege hender.
 – Eg legg med innåt han, eg kjenner med all
 så viljug til eitt å gjera:
 gjeve meg lykkeleg livet i vald –
 livet og vårdagsferda!
 (*Andletet* 8)

(The spring – the spring day leads me astray / from everything I know! / He embraces me tightly – carries me away / with strong and savage hands. / – I lay myself against him, I feel completely / willing to do one thing: / give myself happily to the grip of life – / of life and the journey of spring!)

Here, the speaker celebrates his naked submission to the purity and ecstasy of spring – 'him' – and also to "the grip of life." (Incidentally, *Livet i vold* – here spelled "livet i vald" – was also the title of a 1910 play by Hamsun.) Another poem – equally pansexual

but much more disturbing – imagines a man ominously approaching an adolescent who is sunning himself:

Naken låg guten i graset under solhimlen.
Han låg med atlatne augo mot solskinet,
men munnen var halvopen i ein undrande smil.
Sola låg på den høge bringa og i opne fanget hans
og fór med heite fingrar over håret og andletet
og lemene på han.

...

– Mannen kom vadande nærmere gjennom enga
og tung og kald var skuggen hans –
Safter steig op av avgrunns røter,
og blodraude blømer bruste og brann,
og guten vreid seg under solriset.
Og op or avgrunnen i han steig det ein storm,
og stormen sleit i hans livsens røter,
og guten strekte seg tungt under solhendene –
(*Andletet* 28-29)

(The boy lay naked in the grass under the sunny sky. / He lay with eyes closed facing the sunshine, / but his mouth was half-open in a wondering smile. / The sun glistened on his tall chest and his open arms / and ran its hot fingers over his hair and face / and limbs. ... – The man came wading closer through the meadow / and his shadow was heavy and cold – // Juices rose up from roots in the abyss / and blood-red blossoms bursted and burned / and the boy twisted under the whip of the sun. / And from the abyss inside him came a storm, / and the storm ripped up the roots of his life, / and the boy spread out slowly under the sun's hands.)

The image of the boy twisting “under solriset” (“under the whip of the sun”) offers a glimpse of the masochistic element in Sveen’s eroticism, and the poem ends with the boy’s ecstasy interrupted by the encroaching shadow of the “tung og kald” (“heavy and cold”) man from the forest. Pål Bjørby reads this text as a “shocking, bold, erotic, unafraid description of ‘the boy’s’ autoerotic orgasm” that is unparalleled in Norwegian literature (159), while Eirik Vassenden suggests that the central point is the opposition between the boy’s carefree bodily ecstasy and the presense of a guilt-inducing figure of moral authority (“Sol og skygge” 57). Whether we read this text as a psychoanalytic allegory of the child’s polymorphously perverse body being disciplined by the unfeeling law of the father, or even as a barely encrypted recollection of traumatic sexual abuse, it shows that Sveen’s imagination of taboo eroticism is not merely a sun-lit and shame-free liberation of the senses, but also has a darker and disconcerting side. As Bjørby observes about *The Face* in general, the reader “meets shame, self-torture, desperation, sorrow, longing, and resignation” and experiences “a view of sexuality as violent, regressive, aggressive, animal ... and ‘compulsive’” (159).

Bjørby has helpfully situated Sveen’s poetry in the context of contemporary representations of homosexuality in ‘scientific’ discourses and in literature. He argues

that the negativity, brutality, and shame expressed in *Andletet* result from Sveen's unfortunate internalization of homophobic psychoanalytic and sexological discourses of the time (135). In Sveen's pathologizing understanding of his sexual identity as deviant, Bjørby detects "a perfect Foucaultian meeting between discourse and experience, between patient and expert, where the patient has 'learned' the language of the expert and has begun to think and speak about himself in that language" (144). Thus, Bjørby attributes *Andletet's* shame and distress exclusively to Sveen's familiarity with psychoanalysis, the master discourse that has taught him to pathologize his own sexuality. While theoretically interesting in its Foucaultian view of psychiatric power, this argument is limited in that it ignores many other plausible sources of these negative emotions in Sveen's culture and experience (for instance, bourgeois-Christian morality). Furthermore, it portrays Sveen as a uncritical reader of psychoanalytic texts who simply absorbed their theories of sexuality. The evidence suggests that the opposite was in fact the case, as I will discuss below in relation to Sveen's idea of Eros.

After gaining recognition with *Andletet* and *Jordelden*, Sveen was chosen to spend the summer of 1934 at the *Deutsch-Nordisches Schriftstellerhaus* in Travemünde by Lübeck, as a Nordic literary ambassador to Germany. This writer's institute was part of the *Nordische Gesellschaft*, which originally aimed to promote common Nordic and Germanic cultural ideals and eventually became a vehicle of the Nazi propaganda ministry led by Alfred Rosenberg (Žagar 199-200). This summer was Sveen's introduction to Nazi Germany, and although he remained opposed to German militancy for most of the decade, he began to appreciate "the new mentality" and the enthusiasm of the young Germans: "jeg ser annerledes på meget av nasjonalsosialismen siden jeg virkelig har truffet den nye mentaliteten 'ansikt til ansikt' – så å si" ("I have a different view of much of National Socialism now that I've actually met the new mentality 'face to face' – so to speak") (Gatland 93). When commenting in private correspondence on the "Night of the Long Knives" (the purge of the *Sturmabteilung* on June 20 1934, when Ernst Röhm was murdered), Sveen wrote that the Third Reich had nonetheless managed to secure peace and order, and he refrained from expressing adverse judgment on the murders. During his time in Travemünde, Sveen also gave a speech about Hamsun, perhaps anticipating the view of his later wartime articles, in which he claimed Hamsun as a vanguard figure of fascist cultural revitalization.

Vitalism and the Sacralization of Eros

Having provided an initial glimpse of Sveen's poetry and politics, I will now elaborate on his erotic vitalism and its early twentieth-century background. Vitalism, which I consider a subcategory of cultural modernism, is the key term for understanding the ideological and aesthetic foundations of Sveen's fascist imagination. In the Scandinavian context, *vitalismen* is a cultural historical term that refers to a current of art and literature produced in the several decades before World War II, much of which had no specific connection to fascism.⁸⁵ This 'cultural' usage contrasts with a narrower meaning of the term in English or French, where it often refers to the idea of a life force or principle behind organic life, in contrast to a mechanistic view in the philosophy of science. Influentially, Henri Bergson referred to an *élan vital*, while the German

⁸⁵ See for example *Livskraft: Vitalismen som kunstnerisk impuls 1900-1930* and Aage Jørgensen's article "Vitalisme på dansk – en præsentation."

philosopher Hans Driesch developed a modern notion of entelechy to refer to the metaphysical element that made organic life distinct (Sørensen 14).

These philosophies of organic life were accompanied by a broader set of social and cultural movements throughout Europe, which envisaged some form of revitalization to alleviate the onslaught of urbanization and industrialization in the late nineteenth century. As Roger Griffin has observed, the many life-reform movements that emerged around 1900 occupied a specifically post-Darwinian context: by “radically undermining the metaphysical claims of Christianity, [Darwinism] had also created the cultural space for a cult of biological life” (*Modernism and Fascism* 143-144). Cultural vitalism was secular in this sense, but it can also be seen as a surrogate form of religiosity in a postmetaphysical environment. Indeed, Scandinavian artistic *vitalismen* has been understood as a replacement religion that preserves spiritual ecstasy in the this-worldly experience of vitality.⁸⁶

Eirik Vassenden has described Sveen’s poetry in relation to vitalist aesthetics, showing that it exemplifies typical motifs and themes such as sun-worship, nature mysticism, the ecstatic body, and self-dissolution (282). Indeed, these occur with such frequency in Sveen’s poetry that it seems impossible to understand it without such an aesthetic concept. The moods of Sveen’s poetry shift rapidly and drastically in an expressionistic manner, from what Vassenden calls “ekstatisk glede over å være en del av livsstrømmen til en melankolsk fortvilelse over å være overgitt til individuasjonen og sin egen endelighet og smerte” (“ecstatic joy in being part of the stream of life to melancholic despair in being given over to individuation and one’s own finitude and pain”) (Vassenden 282). Both sides of this dichotomy are rendered with intense and often disturbing images that suit the violence of the limit experiences that are central to Sveen’s poetry.

Sveen’s vitalism and its implicit cultural criticism should be understood in relation to the various idealistic and utopian movements emphasizing youth, health, or natural bodily experience, which arose around the turn of the century. As the German names *Lebensreform* and *Lebensphilosophie* suggest, a new emphasis on the joy of life, health, and bodily experience began to replace the perceived stultification or disintegration of the bourgeois era. For example, the German *Wandervogel* youth organization was founded 1896, and the *Freikörperbewegung* (“Free Body Movement”) appeared in the same decade. A commentator on vitalist painting in Scandinavia writes that “det naturlige, enkle og sunne var på moten og medførte dyrking av ungdommen og det ungdommelige” (“the natural, the simple, and the healthy were in fashion and this entailed a cult of youth and youthfulness”) (Sørensen 14). Griffin uses the term “social modernism” to refer to such ‘naturalist’ or body-centered activities, which he understands as part of the larger generational revolt against the restraints or discontents of bourgeois civilization in the early twentieth century. The German Richard Ungewitter, for instance, “spread the gospel of nudism as an emancipating force that would ‘free’ the body from the pernicious effects of a soft, over-cerebral, and hypocritical civilization” (*Modernism and Fascism* 145). Sveen was apparently quite attracted this new “gospel” of the body; he owned magazines and photography books about *nakenkultur* (nudism), and he shared its anti-intellectualism, its interest in the primitive, and its aversion to industrial modernity.

⁸⁶ One art historian calls vitalism “en erstatningsreligion, der tapet av et gudebilde i det hinsidige bevares som religiøs ekstase i opplevelsen av livsfylde i det dennesidige” (Ydstie 9).

Sveen's poetry glorifies animal corporeality as a reaction to the modern surfeit of civilization, offering what Gatland calls "ein sanselig religiøsitet" ("a religiosity of the senses") (76).

The cultural vitalist mindset, with its prioritization of the sensual and the erotic, conflicts with the Enlightenment or humanistic conceptions of progress and culture that characterize liberal modernity. Because it stresses pre-reflective and immediate life as opposed to rationality and reflection, normative notions of truth, beauty, and morality all become less important in vitalism (Vassenden 281). However problematic or simplistic its emphasis on unconscious life and the body may be, vitalism is not only a reactionary and self-blinding escape into natural harmony (as in the Marxist critique of Hamsun). Vassenden observes that vitalist artworks can offer "a potent point of departure for cultural criticism," although it is not clear that vitalism offers many resources to move far beyond that point (282). Similarly, an art historian observes that skepticism about urban and bourgeois life forms, and about the project of modernity in general, is fundamental in Scandinavian vitalism (Ydstie 9). Skepticism or hostility to bourgeois modernity is so widespread in the history of modern art and literature that this is hardly a distinctive attitude. Yet, perhaps vitalism's combination of intuitive intensity and limited critical precision is what allows it to inhabit a variety of political positions. In any case, the human individual in a vitalist framework is clearly not the autonomous and rational subject of Enlightenment humanism, but is instead subordinate to the heteronomous power of nature, unconscious life, and, as I will now examine in Sveen's case, Eros.

Around the time he published *Eros Syng* (Eros Sings, 1935), Sveen was developing an interest in Sufi mysticism. The Indian philosopher Inayat Khan, who founded a movement based on an interpretation of Sufism outside of Islam, held a lecture in Oslo in 1924. Sveen learned about universal Sufism through acquaintances who had attended this event, and he was fascinated by its devotion to sacred love without limits and its inclusive attitude toward same-sex desire (Gatland 100-101). Because the Sufi tradition depicted and appeared to accept love between men (especially in the works of the Persian mystic poets Hafez and Rumi), it apparently offered Sveen a promise or fantasy of erotic brotherhood.⁸⁷ Although Sveen did not become a serious devotee of Sufi mysticism, it provided a model and antecedent for his own new-age beliefs about divine eros. In *Eros Syng* he alluded to Sufi mystical poetry by including a poem entitled "Ruba'i," after the Persian quatrain (*Eros Syng* 104).

Sveen's concept of Eros connects universal biological life and individual sexual longing, while also acting as an immanent divinity. Eros designates a primordial drive for Sveen, both a source and regenerator of life (Gatland 103). This religious interpretation of Eros contrasted with contemporary psychoanalytic thought. Here is Sveen commenting on *Eros Syng* in a letter:

Det jeg vil med samlingen som helhet er å påvise Eros som alle verdens dypeste kilde, i trangere betydning å identifisere det religiøse med det erotiske. Men i motsetning til de fleste psykoanalytisk overbeviste forfattere, som for så vidt stiller seg innenfor den borgerlig kristelig-ideologiske forestillingskrets som de

⁸⁷ Incidentally, the *ghazal* poetic form used by Rumi and Hafiz acquired a homosexual connotation in Europe in the nineteenth century, as did the Shakespearean sonnet. Heinrich Heine even proposed the term 'ghaselig' as a new way to refer to men who loved men (Robb 213).

ved denne 'identifisering' forsøker å redusere det religiøses verdi – i motsetning til disse vil jeg i min lyrikk gi uttrykk for tanker om det guddommelige i det erotiske. (Gatland 102)

(What I would like to do in this collection as a whole is to show Eros as the deepest source of everything in the world, and in a narrower sense to identify the religious with the erotic. But in contrast to most psychoanalytically oriented writers, who remain within the bourgeois Christian-ideological frame of understanding to such an extent that they attempt to reduce the value of the religious by way of this 'identification' – in contrast to these writers, I would like my poetry to express the idea of the divine in the erotic.)

Sveen pointedly distinguishes his own understanding of the erotic from a supposedly reductionistic psychoanalytic explanation, which he unexpectedly accuses of being trapped in a Christian worldview that holds a low estimation of erotic life. This shows that Sveen saw the contemporary psychoanalytic moment as an extension of the bourgeois rather than its radical challenger, as it is usually understood in relation to this period of Scandinavian cultural radicalism.⁸⁸ This quotation also suggests that Sveen did not simply internalize Freudian or other medical theories about (homo)sexuality, as in Bjørby's reading above; he seems to have been more influenced by mysticism than by 'science.' For Sveen, to say that the religious has its roots in the erotic does not reduce religion to an expression of individual sexual psychology, it elevates the erotic as a sacred principle of life.

This idea formed the basis of the new-age spirituality explored in *Eros Syng*. In the five-part poem of the same title, Eros itself speaks to humanity, calling the individual person "a mirror fragment" that reflects and channels its divinity. Man's desire is the gift of Eros, whose omnipotent drive flows through and animates all life.

Liksom mold i den svarte åker
sender ei kraft til det levande korn
som tenjar seg med sine høge stylker
mot sommarshimlen ...
såleis sender eg duld lengsel
op i ditt liv og alt livet
så det kan tenja seg høgt i sola
og ringe mot himlen!
(*Eros Syng* 93-94)

(As soil in the black field / sends a force through the living grain / that stretches its high stalks / toward the summer sun / ... so I send a hidden longing / through your life and all life / so it can stretch high in the sun / and ring toward the heavens!)

In this organic image, human life and sexual behavior are governed by the workings of an unseen natural divinity, whose power resides in all living things. As the poem continues,

⁸⁸ See for example Leif Longum's *Drømmen om det frie menneske*.

the voice of Eros explains that individuals may perhaps discover the “open secret” (“Løyndomen min er open”) of its mystical omnipresence. In the fourth section, Eros likens its own life-giving power to a river flowing through a landscape. The individual (male) subject is the river bed, while Eros is the animating stream.

Såg du dei sterke åer
som fyller med krefter
skjerutte gråberg-lægjet?
Såg du dei milde elvar
som løyner med venleik
bolkutte raudjords-lægjet?
Såleis kan livet mitt i deg
full-liknas.

Det som du sjøl-deg kallar,
ditt skaltronge sinn,
er som det fattige elvelægjet
er som det steinberre åfaret.
(*Eros Syng* 98).

(Did you see the mighty rapids / that fill worn-out granite / riverbeds with force? /
Did you see the mild streams / that cover rough red earth / riverbeds with care? /
Thus can my life be / complete in you. / What you call your self, / your restricted
mind, / is like the meager riverbed / is like the stone-bare course.)

These lines suggest Sveen’s view that the self and the intellect are empty and arid without the spiritualizing stream of universal erotic life. As the poem ends, Sveen’s analogy emphasizes the reciprocity of individual form and the stream of life: “elvelægjet hadde kje vore / utan elva, / og åa var ikkje å i verda / åtte ho ikkje / åfaret” (“the riverbed would be nothing / without the river, / and the stream would be / no stream without / its course”) (*Eros Syng* 100).

It is easy to understand why this mystical view of sexuality would appeal to Sveen more than the moral constraints and unhealthy guilt he saw in the Christian or bourgeois denigration of the senses and the body. By building loosely on Sufism and contemporary European revitalization movements, Sveen’s erotic vitalism configured the sacred in secular modernity as sexual desire – a universal principle that governs all life. This eroticism offered a way to transcend the ‘soul-less’ individual of bourgeois modernity. As the poem “Til dei unge menn” will make apparent below, Sveen’s gospel of desire was also a gospel of the virile masculine body, which instantiates the will of universal Eros in the automatic and healthy unfolding of its desires.

While the attractions of cultural vitalism for an early twentieth-century poet seeking sexual (self-)acceptance and healthy expressiveness are apparent enough, the idea that National Socialism could be seen as sexually liberating for similar reasons will perhaps meet resistance. After all, such a view challenges the predominant understanding of totalitarianisms as sexually repressive or puritanical. Postwar interpretations of fascism in particular have frequently imagined the fascist individual as sexually repressed or

deviant; the stereotype's distorted sexuality signifies the ultimate unhealthiness of fascist repression, not a greater freedom of expression (Frost). If German fascism was fundamentally conservative in sexual terms, it would seem that Sveen's emancipatory erotic vitalism was simply in conflict with his support for fascism.

However, Nazi sexual ideology was more complicated, and it appears that Sveen did not experience a strong conflict between his homosexuality and his fascism. This is partially due to the fact that he was in (willed?) ignorance of the reality and violence of fascist homophobia. But it is also because German fascism was not as uniformly sexually repressive as many assume. Dagmar Herzog's abovementioned research on sex and fascism supports the view that Nazism was not simply sexually conservative. As she claims, "the conventional periodization suggests that the Third Reich's sexual politics can best be understood as a reactionary backlash against the freedom and openness of the Weimar Republic" (14). *Sex After Fascism* argues that this view results from postwar interpretations made by the New Left, which theorized a connection between sexual emancipation and socio-political justice. This perspective on fascism underestimated its "sexually liberalizing tendencies" and overlooked the conflicts between the Nazi regime and the Christian church over sexual morality (4). According to Herzog, the New Left perspective did so because theoretically it could not countenance the fact that "advocacy of sexual expression coexisted with virulent racism and mass murder" (5). Crucially and obviously, only certain forms of sexual expression were officially advocated and tolerated – healthy, 'racially' correct ones; homosexuality was not among them – but the disregarded point is that German fascism promoted pleasurable sexual experience for most of the population.

Going further, Herzog contends that these new sexually liberating attitudes were linked to the process of secularization, which led to the attribution of greater existential significance to romantic love and sexuality. She quotes Nazi authorities who saw the sexual drive as "holy" and "sacred," placing it at a transcendental level of "eternal values" (29). Secularization did not mean only the diminished authority of traditional religious beliefs and decreasing church attendance; it was also "a reworking of languages and attitudes, a sort of compromise formation in which this-worldly matters were described as having divine significance" (30). Herzog sees the sacralization of sex and love as important aspects of Nazism's secular reconfiguration of sexual morality, as witnessed in the words of Nazi pedagogues and psychotherapists and even in the SS journal *Das Schwarze Korps*. She labels such attitudes "a kind of proto-New Age sentimentality that intersected with both deistic nature-loving Nazi racism and with what people genuinely experienced as involving their [...] supreme experiences of happiness" (32-33). Here we can discern an elective affinity with the erotic and nature-worshipping vitalism Sveen developed in his modernist poetry.

The overlap between Sveen's sexual ideology and fascism's consists in the vitalistic sacralization of the erotic. A major difference is that, while Sveen used a sacred notion of universal erotic desire to legitimate same-sex relations (among other forms of sexual expression), fascism did not seek to expand the array of approvable sexual identities. On the contrary, it "reasserted the necessity of heterosexual marriage and biological reproduction" even as it used liberalized sexuality as a tool of manipulation (Woodley 226). Nazism was only sexually 'emancipatory' insofar as this sexuality was bridled to the cause of the biological and social reproduction of the nation. It is crucial to

remember that “while fascism promotes heterosexual virility and fertility with a demonic intensity ... this secular glorification of sexual potency categorically excludes any acceptance or legitimation of homosexual relations” (226). In German fascism, aspects of sexuality that were not ‘racially hygienic’ or healthily procreative were not only discouraged, they were projected onto the demonized figure of the Jew (Eksteins 319). Nation, race, and sexuality were clearly linked in fascist ideology, as expressions of sexuality were “subordinated to the biopolitical design of the state,” both in order to amplify the racially approvable population and to make it fitter and healthier as a bulwark against degeneracy (Woodley 230).

At the same time, however, Sontag suggested in her well-known essay “Fascinating Fascism” that Nazism had an “erotic surface” and was “sexier” than communism – especially, she claimed, for homosexual men (even anti-fascists) (103). The following section examines more closely the role that Sveen’s vitalistic imagination of masculinity played in his poetry and its political overlap with fascism, despite the latter’s prohibition against homosexuality. In the energetic but unsettling poem I will analyze presently, masculine sexual virility is both glorified and racialized.

Wellsprings in the Wasteland

“Til dei unge menn” is the fascist climax of Sveen’s vitalism as well as a voyeuristically homoerotic poem. It appeared in his fourth poetry collection, *Såmannen*, which was published the day before Nazi Germany invaded Norway (April 9, 1940), seven months before he joined *Nasjonal Samling*. This was also the poem Sveen later chose to represent his own contribution to the nationalist canon in his propaganda anthology *Norsk ånd og vilje*. He obviously considered it a literary expression of the utopian social vision he saw in National Socialism. Here is the poem in its entirety (see the end of the chapter for an English translation).

Når de kjem byksande liene ned i somarkvelden
– eikestres lår, bjørketres bringe, hender av einerrot –
ned til eit gammalt dansarhus på furumoen ved elva,
og stig-inn i stuga og speiar i møybenken
så huldrene fjetrast under augstålet,
og når de skrid gjennom sal
– raude og gule skjefte ikring harde halser –
og leikar med lamungan dykkar og dansar på bjørnlegger,
da liker eg dykk,
og når du raudmynte kvinnfolk-røvar raskar på heimveg
vadande gjennom engen føre dag
med grasfrø på skorne, søte i anden, doggperler i hår
og dansen enno duvand i mjuke leder,
å da liker eg deg!
Dansar sjela di og i solrenninga?

Og når de vitjar gjenten i bu og kammers
– ei ny, ei ny kvar laurdagskveld –
og kjenner undringa deira i det gode mørker,

ja nør de ligg med bringene berre liksom solbakkar
der vårgras brydder,
og freistar og elsker dykkar eigen manndom,
da liker eg dykk,
og når du har funne henne blodet ditt leiter etter
og luter deg mot, så håret ditt skygger anletet på ho
– siv over vatn, bar over sjø –
å da kjenner eg deg.
Da øygnar eg ljøsken av den fyrste kjærkleiken!
Ein gong skal han loga igjennom alt ditt verande.

Nordavinds søner! Synnavinds elskarar!
Riddarar av flog og renn!
Når de kjem susande stavlaust ned over hengande skavlar
og skriv med løypene djerve ord i undrande snø,
når de kjem ridand i langkut gjennom den grisne skog
øvande hestar av edelt blod i haustdagen,
og når de fer med leande munn i lynvognar
– oljestrek over ivrig pann, flygande hår –
da liker eg dykk,
og når du, ørnevilje, vinn i rømnda
og fyk med din pilsnøgge stålfugl vidt over fjell og hav
og borar deg einspissa opp til iskalde høgder –
å da likar eg deg!
Kjenner du og det svimrande floget inn – inn
i hjartehimlen?

Såmenn for Gud og verda!
Ser eg dykk utpå opne marker våronndagen
– sol over sveitte andletsdrag og mold på hand og fot –
når kornet drys ifrå henden dykkar i sågiddret
og dagen legg gull i dykkar råa plogskjer,
undrast eg glad:
røkjer de og ein åker i det dulde?
Og når de tømrrar heim til born og kvinner,
og nør de reiser byrge murar i aulande byar
– store hus, strålende hus, mykje nyttelege åt samfundet –
å da elsker eg dykk!
Byggjer de samfund av ånd?

Og du som spenner bru over svartnande klufter,
borar ganger i berg og kjelder i øydemark
og reiser sigrande tårn på ville fjell –
takk for auga dine!
Kanskje du sjølv ein gong skal stige
liksom eit fjell av velsigning millom aude sjeler.

Å born av sol og ljøs,
 de som har fått slik hyllest av natura!
 Eg ser dykk på gule strender ved grøn sjø,
 de dyrkar lekamen dykkar og elsker sola.
 Eg likar dykk.
 Kjenner de og den sannings sol
 som brenn ved midnatt?
 (*Såmannen* 23-26)

This bizarre and kitschy poem brings together a catalogue of Sveen's intellectual and artistic concerns, including mystical (homo)eroticism, a deliberately archaic lexicon, and the hope for a spiritual society. In a seasonal progression, the (presumably male) speaker voices his voyeuristic desire for the virile sowers (*såmenn*), occasionally pausing to wonder if these men share his spiritual knowledge and to convey the power of erotic ecstasy. At the beginning of the poem, in summertime, the men's bodies are likened to trees ("thighs of oak, chests of birch, hands of juniper root") and thus presented as a natural force of the forest. This sense of natural vigor is reinforced as the men "dance on bear's legs" while seducing passive women. In addition to this animalization, the speaker awkwardly poses a spiritual question to one of the men: "dansar sjela di og i solrenninga?" ("does your soul also dance at the break of day?"). This line introduces the poem's ongoing curiosity about the interior life of the men in addition to the automatic and 'natural' unfolding of their sexuality.

The second stanza continues to portray the men as part of nature; with a body-landscape of "bringene berre liksom solbakkar / der vårgras brydder" ("chests bare like sunlit slopes / where spring grass sprouts") they revel in their own masculinity, and their blood leads them to a heterosexual object choice. While the speaker repeatedly exclaims his enjoyment in viewing these men, this attraction is not reciprocal; the men's sexual activity in the poem remains heterosexual even though the speaker's gaze upon it is homoerotic. As the second stanza continues portraying the men's desire as a force of nature and the blood, the spiritual dimension of the erotic also returns: the "undringa ... i det gode mørker" ("wonder of the blessed dark"), and more emphatically, the love that "ein gong skal ... loga igjenom alt ditt verande" ("one day will blaze through your entire being").

The third stanza observes the men performing winter athletics and riding "horses of noble blood," a line that indicates the concern for racial purity that will also appear in Sveen's wartime articles. In the second half of this stanza, the speaker focuses on an "eagle-willed" man as he "dash[es] with [his] arrow-quick bird of steel high over mountains and sea / and penetrate[s] to ice-cold heights" (*fyk med din pilsnøgge stålfugl vidt over fjell og hav / og borar deg einspissa opp til iskalde høgder*). The phallic nature of this futuristic imagery is self-evident, and as usual, a syrupy spiritual question accompanies the sexual: "Kjenner du og det svimrande floget inn – inn / i hjartehimlen?" ("Do you also know the dizzying flight – into / the heart of heaven?"). Here, the speaker seems to seek identification with the heterosexual men in a common experience of the mystical erotic.

The poem reaches spring in the fourth stanza, as the "sowers for God and the world" work on farms and construct cities. These activities remain sexualized in a double

sense. The homoerotic gaze on the men continues to configure them as robust and alluring masculine bodies as they work, with the “sun on [their] sweaty faces” plowing the fields. Also, the men themselves continue to possess erotic agency, scattering seeds “in the vibrations of sowing” (*når kornet drys ifrå hendene dykkar i sågiddret*) and reproducing. As seen above in “Eros Syng,” Sveen imagined the individual’s sexual desire as an instantiation of the larger mystical force of Eros. Similarly, the sowers in “Til dei unge menn” are vehicles for such a universal erotic principle of life.

In this manner, the poem imagines a utopian vision of a nation and society erected by erotically potent men. The final stanza praises “kjelder i øydemark” (“wellsprings in the wasteland”) and “sigrande tårn på ville fjell” (“victorious towers in the wilderness”), contrasting the heroic fertility of the men to the surrounding desolation and barrenness. The phrase “kjelder i øydemark” also calls to mind Eliot’s “The Wasteland,” a poem with a somewhat similar critique of modernity’s sterility, which in Sveen’s case takes an ‘optimistic’ turn to utopian revitalization. The speaker hopes that the virile men are sources of spiritual and social regeneration, and that they will rise up “liksom eit fjell av velsigning millom aude sjeler” (“like a mountain of benediction among desolate souls”). “Til dei unge menn” may resemble an inane piece of fascist kitsch, but it is nonetheless significant as an object of historical and cultural analysis. Sveen manages to run the gamut of fascist aesthetics, from the national-romantic glorification of farm labor to an almost futurist style of speed and metal in the winter sports section.⁸⁹ The poem is especially pertinent to the discussion of masculinity in fascist artworks, and to the cult of masculinity in fascism more generally. Indeed, the poem is obsessed with the idealized physical beauty and socially reproductive function of the virile masculine body.

Because “Til dei unge menn” accentuates same-sex desire, it also raises some interesting questions about the homoerotic surface of fascist masculinity. Although fascism rejected effeminacy and sexual deviance quite violently in practice, its representational connection to homosexuality is strangely ambivalent (Woodley 212). Fascist representations of masculinity often have a homoerotic charge that seems at odds with the ideology’s oppressive enforcement of compulsory heterosexuality. Such representations tend to glorify the virility and fertility of men while suppressing the influence of femininity, even fantasizing biological and social reproduction without women, as in Italian Futurism (218). Sveen’s masculinist aesthetic does not offer the fantasy of male self-sufficiency and misogynistic violence associated with Futurism, but his poetry does imagine an idealized and eroticized male figure of regeneration: “The Sower” (*Såmannen*). Sveen’s sower can be contrasted with another fascist hero of masculinity, the soldier; his text does not glorify the martial vitality of the trenches and the struggle of battle, but rather the erotic, agrarian, and spiritual reproduction of the nation. Women do not take an active role in this process; in Sveen’s imagination they remain passive objects in traditional social roles, if they are not neglected entirely.

⁸⁹ A useful source illustrating the heterogeneity of fascist aesthetics is Golsan (ed.), *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture*. At the end of Sveen’s poem, the praise of “children of sun and light ... on golden shores” (*born av sol og ljøs ... på gule strender*) suggests two pictorial associations: the work of the early twentieth century Danish vitalist painter J. F. Willumsen, but also a *Nasjonal Samling* propaganda poster by the illustrator Harald Damsleth, which shows a naked Nordic family on a beach, heralding a sun glowing with the NS insignia.

It has been observed that a tension exists in fascism between, on the one hand, its homosocial fantasy of male camaraderie and independence from women, and on the other hand, its strict rejection of conscious homosexuality. As Eve Sedgwick writes, “Fascism is distinctive ... not for the intensity of its homoerotic charge, but rather for the virulence of the homophobic prohibition by which that charge, once crystallized as an object of knowledge, is then denied *to* knowledge” (qtd. in *Political Inversions* 34). In the end, situating Sveen’s homoerotic poem in this already complex field of sexuality and representation is difficult. In one sense, “Til dei unge menn” might be seen as subversive in that it foregrounds actual same-sex desire, the scandal that is prohibited to knowledge in most fascist representations of the virile masculine body. On the other hand, any such subversiveness is rather insignificant given that the poem’s homoerotic desire only intensifies its idealization of the men’s natural vitality, making its queerness seem part of its fascist imagination rather than a truly countervailing tendency.

“Homo-Fascism?”

In the quotation from the opening of this chapter, Herzog eloquently poses the problem of how historians (or literary scholars) might develop models to account for the attraction National Socialism exerted for some homosexual men, without replicating the homophobic prejudices of previous approaches. While virile male sexuality is central in “Til dei unge menn,” I would resist the reading encapsulated in the following statement from Imerslund’s study of Sveen:

En kan også sette mannsorienteringen i Sveens diktning i sammenheng med mannsorienteringen innenfor nazistisk ideologi. Nazismen var en ideologi skapt av og for (sterke) menn, og det er ikke usannsynlig at dette er en medvirkende årsak til at Sveen følte seg tiltrukket av den. ‘Sveen var nok i tillegg ekstra overveldet av de mange uniformerte unge menn som var kommet til landet og var derfor særlig entusiastisk overfor alt det som var i ferd med å skje,’ sier Nils Johan Ringdal ... Nå var nazistene utad svært negative til homofil. Likevel er det blitt avslørt i etterkrigstida at det også blant tyske toppnazister var flere skjulte homofile. (Imerslund 197-198)

(The masculine orientation of Sveen’s poetry can also be seen in connection to the masculine orientation of Nazi ideology. Nazism was an ideology created by and for (strong) men, and it is not unlikely that this was a contributing factor in Sveen’s attraction to it. ‘Sveen was probably also extra overwhelmed by the many uniformed young men who had come to the country and was therefore especially enthusiastic about everything that was about to occur,’ says Nils Johan Ringdal. ... Now, the Nazis were outwardly quite negative towards homosexuals. Nonetheless, it was revealed in the postwar period that there were also several closeted homosexuals among the major German Nazis.)

The first two sentences are not objectionable, but in what follows Imerslund sees no significant distinction between homosexuality and Nazism’s ‘masculine orientation.’ Sveen’s attraction to men is employed to explain his attraction to National Socialism. After conceding that the Nazis were “outwardly” – that is, only apparently – negative

towards homosexuals, Imerslund mentions the possibility that Hitler was a homosexual. (This idea is not taken seriously by Hitler's most respected biographer, Ian Kershaw.)⁹⁰ He even conjectures that the homophobic attitudes of important Nazis resulted from their own self-hatred as gays (198). (The statement Imerslund cites about Sveen being "overwhelmed" by uniformed men during the Nazi invasion of Norway mystifies the issue; wouldn't most heterosexual women have become fascists according to this logic?) Fortunately, Sveen's biographer resists such an explanation, voicing doubt that Sveen's fascination with the masculine body as an expression of Germanic spirit was a significant motivation for his politics. He calls it "incomprehensible that, as a homosexual, he voluntarily enters this system," and thus expresses the sense of paradox that this chapter has been addressing (Gatland 146). Plainly, homosexuality is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for a fascist fascination with the virile masculine body; such a "masculine orientation" needs to be differentiated from a homosexual identity.

The explanation that sees Sveen's sexual and political deviations as significantly connected partakes in a more widespread linkage of homosexuality and fascism, which has been scrutinized by Laura Frost and Andrew Hewitt. In *Sex Drives: Fantasies of Fascism in Literary Modernism*, Frost examines eroticized representations of fascism and Nazism, referring not only to fascist characters in literature and film, but also to a scholarly tendency to think of fascism in terms of sexual deviance. One objective of her book is to examine how fascist dictatorships came to be understood "as a libidinal phenomenon" and why fascism came to be "privileged as a particularly sexual ideology" (Frost 3, 5). For example, William L. Shirer's bestselling history *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (1960) identified top SA leaders as "notorious perverts [who] quarreled and feuded as only men of unnatural sexual inclinations, with their peculiar jealousies, can" (qtd. in Frost 99). In this way, Shirer offensively simplified the erotic profile of Nazism into "an already popular homophobic reading of Nazism as homosexual – either overt or repressed" in a kind of "sexual scapegoating" (99). A longer formulation of Frost's argument is worth citing in this context:

In the Allied nations, a selected form of sexuality – heterosexuality founded on equality, respect, and nonviolence – was validated as a reflection of democratic national ideals, while particular sexualities that did not fall into line with this norm were designated 'fascist.' Sadoomasochistic eroticism, for example, was not supposed to be a part of democratic or socialist politics ... [Fascism] became the sadoomasochistic politics par excellence. Male homosexuality was also, in these discourses of respectable, democratic national sexuality, frequently associated with fascism. (Frost 7)

The sexual deviance of fascists was not empirically established apart from isolated instances (such as Ernst Röhm, who was murdered in 1934), but despite the paucity of historical evidence, fascism has repeatedly been 'explained' by homosexuality, sadoomasochism, or an otherwise 'abnormal' libidinal structure.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Frost writes that "Ian Kershaw raises the subject [of homosexuality] only in the context of 'victims of social prejudice,'" quoting the second volume of Kershaw's Hitler biography.

⁹¹ The power dynamics of sadoomasochistic sexuality, which involve positions of submission and dominance, lend themselves to a loose political analogy with authoritarian power. Yet, as Frost

Frost reveals how marginal sexualities were aligned with political transgressions in explanations of fascism, and she thus provides an important caveat regarding the importance given to Sveen's homosexuality in an explanation of his politics. Similarly, Andrew Hewitt's *Political Inversions* offers a theoretical discussion of the ways homosexuality and fascism have been conflated in popular culture and also in more rarefied realms of thinking, such as Adorno's assertion in *Minima Moralia* that "totalitarianism and homosexuality belong together" (qtd. in *Political Inversions* 39). Arguing against the surprisingly common 'homosexualization' of the totalitarian libido, Hewitt examines the rhetorical work performed by "the identification of homosexuality with fascism in the order of our political imagination" (6-7). Like Frost, Hewitt thinks that sexual interpretations of fascism reveal more about the discourse producing them than about fascism itself, and he is motivated by indignation that "the homosexual is more readily imagined as the subject of some imagined fascism, than as its object or victim" (3). Hewitt argues that the rhetorical construction of "Homo-Fascism" results from a double fear that a non-fascist social order might result in fascism and that homosocial structures might verge too much on homosexuality. Because of this fear, says Hewitt, "the well-known fact of the homosexuality of Ernst Röhm [was] seized on so readily as a way of explaining fascism as a psychological and libidinal structure" (10-11).⁹²

Hewitt's most important claim for the present context is that linking fascism to homosexuality functions as a way of representing fascism's supposedly mysterious or unthinkable appeal. "Homo-fascism" makes fascism readable as a political inversion with a safely 'other' psycho-erotic structure, in which narcissism, aestheticism, or masculinism all play an excessive role (*Political Inversions* 10-37).⁹³ A similar rhetorical operation occurs when Imerslund finds the key to Sveen's fascism not in the newspaper articles and other statements that offer direct accounts of his political behavior, but rather in his homoeroticism. Imerslund's suggestion that self-hating homosexuality is the secret of fascist identification follows closely after a discussion of Sveen's politics in which he avoids taking Sveen's ideas seriously, calling one of his articles "so imprecise and unclear that it is nearly meaningless" (Imerslund 195). But while Sveen's accounts of his ideological motivations might be vague in some respects, they utilize ideas and terms immediately recognizable from fascist discourse. Sveen describes National Socialism as

convincingly argues, these structural similarities must be limited and qualified. "Sadomasochistic fantasies [as expressed in literary form] have no inherent relation to fascism," she writes, viewing it as crucial "to mark a difference between the violence of enacted historical fascism and sadomasochistic eroticism" (33). In doing so, Frost turns to Georges Bataille for a distinction between "erotism" (the "sexuality that violently shatters the subject" into rapture of ecstasy) and "sadism" (non-reciprocal cruelty). Frost: "Eroticism requires a complementary, interconnected recognition, whereas fascist cruelty seeks to exclude, reject, and obliterate the other" (34); "the most relevant crime of fascism is not 'sexual sadism' but murder" (35).

⁹² And as Herzog sharply observes, "to extrapolate from Röhm to all of Nazism is not only historically inaccurate but serves above all two aims: tarring homosexuality in general with the brush of fascism and genocide and diverting attention from the escalated homophobic persecution and the tormenting and murder of male homosexuals, which indeed became a hallmark of Nazism" (12).

⁹³ David Carroll reaches a similar conclusion in *French Literary Fascism*: "Whether fascism is considered *the supreme* expression of the masculine or *the less than masculine* expression of an 'inferior,' feminized male is ultimately of less importance than the characterization of the fascist as a foreign or pathological *other*, as representing what is radically different from the ideal political or libidinal norm" (158).

an “idealistic” alternative to Enlightenment humanism, and he claims that the values emphasized in his poetic vitalism would be resuscitated after bourgeois modernity’s onslaught of banality. In the following, concluding section, I examine some of Sveen’s wartime statements in the context of fascist cultural discourse, reiterating that his political vitalism was continuous with his aesthetic vitalism.

Fascist Revitalization

“Our age is the hour when the centaur rears its head in man and reveals its universal wisdom and its abyssal madness.”

– Åsmund Sveen, 1940⁹⁴

While Sveen’s fascism should not be traced back directly and problematically to his homosexuality, his eroticism and his fascism were indeed linked through a third term, his vitalism. We have seen that Sveen’s cult of sensuality and eros provided an emancipatory and quasi-religious discourse that he found open and amenable to his homosexuality. Regrettably, it also overlapped with vitalistic strands of fascist ideology, and he bought into the widespread fantasy that National Socialism was a revolutionary project whose destiny was to reinvigorate the West and to save it from decline. Further, as we see in his writings on authors like Knut Hamsun and Tarjei Vesaas, Sveen thought modern literature belonged to a century of fascist revitalization, which would restore a materialistic and repressed civilization to the health of the pure and naked body.

We should recall that Sveen did not identify as a National Socialist in the thirties, although he seems to have been drifting in that direction throughout the decade. In 1934, he wrote home from the *Deutsch-Nordisches Schriftstellerhaus* in northern Germany: “jeg er ikke blitt nasjonalsosialist, hele ånden er en annen en min – jeg er pasifist og det er nærmest et skjellsord her nede” (“I haven’t become a National Socialist, the whole idea of it is different from mine – I’m a pacifist and that’s nearly a dirty word down here”) (Gatland 92). However, as mentioned above, Sveen also wrote that he was beginning to understand “the new mentality” and that if revealed his true opinion about contemporary German politics to the leftist *Arbeiderbladet*, they would refuse to print it (92-93). Eventually, Sveen did align himself publically with the “spiritual” politics offered by German and Norwegian fascism, joining the *Nasjonal Samling* in November 1940. While this decision might be explained in terms of his difficult economic conditions, his opportunism, or his political ingenuousness, it would be misleading to ignore how fascism caught Sveen’s poetic imagination in a more substantial way.

While European fascism has often been understood as regressive and anti-modern, the current analysis has been following historians such as Roger Griffin who see it as a utopian attempt to establish an alternative modernity based on a nationalist vision of renewal in a new age. As explained in the introductory chapter, Griffin influentially uses the term “palingenesis” (rebirth) to refer to the fascist myth of nationalist or ethnic rebirth after a period of degeneration. Sveen’s articles from the Second World War fit this model very well, with their critique of liberal and Marxist materialism in favor of a

⁹⁴ “Vår tid er den timen da kentauren lyfter hovudet i menneskja og openberrar sin universelle visdom og sitt avgrunnsdjupe vanvit.” (Gatland 124)

cultural-spiritual revolutionary restoration. Griffin has also advanced the argument that Italian Fascism and Nazism were cultural “revitalization movements” with a deep connection to artistic and literary modernism; whether or not this argument works in all cases and respects, it is certainly illuminating for Sveen’s vitalist modernism (*Modernism and Fascism* 210).

Sveen’s described the appeal of fascism in terms of a new idealistic and utopian project that would embrace the pre-modern and the primitive as models for a future alternative to the capitalist and materialist present. In “Hvorfor jeg er medlem av NS,” from 1944, he explained National Socialism as the rebirth of an authentic European culture after four hundred years of dessicating materialism and rationalism. It was a spiritual politics tinged with racial sentiment and fear of degeneracy, as he writes: “jeg er spiritualist og idealist og ser på oppgjøret med materialismen som vårt århundredes historiske innebyrd ... Denne bevegelse må gjenføde den hvite manns verden, ellers er aftenlandene dømt til undergang” (“I am a spiritualist and an idealist, and I see the revolt against materialism as the historical meaning of our century ... This movement must regenerate the white man’s world, or the West is condemned to destruction”) (“Hvorfor”). Here, Sveen expresses the generically fascist idea of a new civilization arising from “the decay and demise of demo-liberal civilization,” in Mussolini’s words (*Fascism* 72). Like Mussolini and Giovanni Gentile, the Italian philosopher of fascism who described it as a revolutionary “total conception of life,” Sveen saw fascism as more than an ordinary politics (*Fascism* 54). He saw it as an “original historical idea” that would save the West from decaying liberalism and the threat of Bolshevism; his fascism was based on a melodramatic and metaphysical view of European history (“Hvorfor”).

The argument that poetry and politics are separate and unrelated activities would be especially odd to apply to Sveen; he was probably the *Nasjonal Samling* member who did the most to find antecedents for National Socialist ideology in Scandinavian art and literature. Furthermore, his published explanations of fascist politics were couched in conspicuously cultural and literary terms, rather than in a properly political or economic discourse. In an article called “Art and the Age” (“Kunsten og Tiden”), which appeared in the NS organ *Fritt Folk* in 1943, Sveen praises fascist art for its quasi-religious imagination, which addresses the fundamental and universal mysteries of life. He writes that the spiritual or cultural life (*åndsliv*) of the new fascist age is already visible in the works of certain literary figures such as Hamsun and Vigeland, but also, less predictably, Ibsen and Södergran (Imerslund 194). In general, as the art historian Mark Antliff has written, the fascist method of dealing with cultural tradition was to “selectively plunder their historical past for moments reflective of the values they wished to inculcate for their radical transformation of national consciousness and public institutions” (Antliff 26). This was precisely the manner in which Sveen edited *Norsk ånd og vilje*, a canon that collected texts from Eddic poetry through Bjørnson and Ibsen and even included speeches by Quisling. In a recent article, Eivind Tjønneland analyzes Sveen’s anthology and argues that it exemplifies fascism’s selective use of literature and history to fabricate or ‘fashion’ an idealized and mythic vision of the national past (100).

Anti-realist and modernist literature in particular embodied for Sveen the values he saw as part of fascism’s historical wave. In an article written for an anthology about Northern Norway, Sveen praised Hamsun for his “revolusjonær og konservativ ... [kamp] mot forflating og utarming og mekanisering” (“revolutionary and conservative ... [fight]

against banalization and impoverishment and mechanization”) (“Diktarar og dikting” 222). In Sveen’s hands, Hamsun’s authorship points the way forward to a nationalist and vitalistic triumph over the banal and mechanized modern age. In a 1942 lecture about other fascist cultural figures, Sveen wrote that the task of contemporary poetry was to show the way back to “den opphavelige åndelige innsikt og den symbolstyrken som er gått tapt i så meget av den nyere sivilisasjons kunst” (“the original spiritual insight and the symbolic power that has been missing in so much of modern civilization’s art”), and he distinguished this new poetry from both “den dekadente borgerlige privatpersonlige lyrikken og den rasjonalistisk-borgerlige tendens-poesien” (“the decadent bourgeois lyric poetry of the private individual and rationalistic bourgeois tendentious poetry”) (Gatland 151). Post-bourgeois literature for Sveen was supposed to reconnect with the mysteries and wisdom of the distant past, while rejecting the individualism and shallow rationalism of the recent past. This search for primordial values to revitalize the modern age was a crucial theme of fascist literary modernism (*Modernism and Fascism* 100-126).

When Sveen reviewed Tarjei Vesaas’ novel *Kimen* (The Seed, 1940), he revealed the influence of both Hamsunian anti-realism and aesthetic vitalism in his conception of literary modernity. For Sveen, the novel also showed the current need to recognize the value of the animal in man (*dyret i menneskja*).

Dei som trur at den nye europeiske diktninga skal bli borgarlege idyllar, misseromaner, bollelitteratur – tek i miss. Det skal bli den evige diktinga om menneskja, men meir enn nokon gong diktinga om heile menneskja, om sind og blod, om kjærleik og gru, om visdom og drift, om ljøs og mørker. Vår tid er den timen da kentauren lyfter hovudet i menneskja og openberrar sin universelle visdom og sitt avgrunnsdjupe vanvit ... Den nye diktinga må hjelpe til å gi nytt liv å verda ved å opne vegane inn til den åndelege røyndom. Og dei vegane går gjennom kentuar-landet. (Gatland 124)

(Those who think that the new European literature will include bourgeois idylls and sentimental novels are mistaken. It will be the eternal literature of mankind, but more than ever it will be literature about the whole person, about the blood and the mind, about love and horror, about wisdom and desire, about light and darkness. Our age is the hour when the centaur rears its head in man and reveals its universal wisdom and its abyssal madness. ... The new literature must help to give new life to the world by opening paths to spiritual mysteries. And those paths lead through the land of the centaur.)

Sveen’s future-primitive liberation of the animal in man was, as discussed above, part of a broader urge toward sexual revolution and a new culture of the body in the early twentieth century. Here, the centaur raising its head against modern rationalism and against the repression of the animal-in-man supplies a dynamic image for the historical narrative of primordial reconnection that Sveen saw in his own time. He praises the ‘wisdom’ of animalistic desire, which is of a piece with the sacralization of the erotic and the sensual upon which much of his poetry was built. But he also acknowledges its other side – its “abyssal madness.” This dual image of revelation – the centaur unveiling its divine wisdom along with its demonic terror – suits Sveen’s portentous reading of

fascism as a vehicle for the spiritual and erotic redemption of European modernity, and as a world-historical force embracing the mystical energies of nature and sex explored in his own poetry. It also reveals the recklessness of his imagination of redemption.

For Sveen, the utopian dream of overcoming the rationalist paradigm of bourgeois modernity was so intoxicating that it obscured the glaring problems of Nazism, even from his homosexual perspective as a potential victim. We should recall, however, that Sveen did not perceive National Socialism as a homophobic threat, but rather as a movement of synthesis and harmony that would not exclude his marginal sexuality. It is chilling to read Sveen, deluded that a new fascist age is imminent, write in “Kunsten og Tiden” that “viljen til sammenføring, syntese, harmoni ... først må bevirke en rensningsprosess, en storm i verden, [som] er historisk nødvendig. At stormen virker på oss nærsynte mennesker som kaos og vold er også naturlig” (“the will to integration, synthesis, harmony ... must first bring about a cleansing process, a storm in the world, [which] is historically necessary. That the storm seems chaotic and violent to us nearsighted people is also natural”) (Gatland 152). This is one of Sveen’s most inexcusable statements; he employs a typical fascist rhetoric of apocalypse and palingenesis to justify the storm around him from a perspective of historical necessity.

After his actions during World War II, it is difficult to see Sveen’s work from the 1930s in a neutral political light, although it is worth remembering that he was not perceived as a fascist poet before his collaboration, and that vitalism was not an exclusively fascist aesthetic. Rather, Scandinavian vitalism in the early twentieth century was a politically multivalent discourse of anti-rationalism, erotic liberation, sensual utopianism, and generational revolt. Sveen’s literary vitalism envisioned a neoprimitive attitude toward the body and a religious understanding of sexuality, which he sacralized in his mythopoetic figure of Eros. As a Norwegian writer, Sveen belonged to a peripheral European culture which has been exoticized as a primitive and healthier location by continental Europeans, and also by Scandinavians. In her book on Hamsun, Žagar notices the parallels “between Scandinavian primitivism and that projected onto the Orient and other exotic locales;” each location has been constructed as an authentic, sexually vital, and natural escape from an over-civilized Continental Europe (49). This construction of Scandinavian primitivism shows how Sveen’s literary vitalism could have coalesced with his romantic nationalism and his interest in forms of Norwegian folk art. By including traditional *bygdeviser* in his collections along with his boldly experimental works, Sveen achieved the “primitivist synthesis of traditionalist and modernist artistic forms” that has also been considered typical of fascist cultural production in other national contexts (Antliff 45). By looking to Sufi mysticism and to early twentieth-century revitalization movements, Sveen found sources of sensuality and religiosity that were supposedly absent in the repressive ‘iron cage’ of modern Europe.

Finally, it bears repeating that Sveen’s embrace of fascism, though related to the infatuation with masculine virility and mystical eroticism that we find in “Til dei unge menn,” was not simply a political expression of homosexual desire. Although Sveen might initially seem to provide an empirical example to support the connection of homosexuality and fascism that Frost, Hewitt, and Herzog all analyze critically, we should avoid reading this problematic poet from a perspective in which his political and sexual deviations are assumed to be correlated. Sveen was obsessed with the spiritual crisis of secularized societies in the early twentieth century, and he viewed communism

and capitalism as twin expressions of a godforsaken modern materialism that fascism would overpower. Acting on the regenerative and erotic visions laid out in his poetry, he supported National Socialism in Norway and Germany as a utopian revitalization movement that would surpass, in Ezra Pound's famous words, a "botched civilization."⁹⁵

"To the Young Men"
(A literal translation of "Til dei unge menn")

When you come bounding down the hillsides in the summer evening
– thighs of oak, chests of birch, hands of juniper root –
to an old dancing house on the pine heath by the river,
and step into the room and peer at the maidens
so the hulders [sirens of Scandinavian folklore] are spellbound under the stable,
and when you slip through the hall
– red and yellow scarves around strong necks –
and play with your lambs and dance on bear's legs,
I like you then,
and when you, red-mouthed woman-robber, hurry homeward
wading through meadows before daybreak
with grass seeds on your shoes, a sweetened spirit, dew drops in your hair
and the dance still swaying in gentle rhythms,
how I like you then!
Does your soul also dance at the break of day?
And when you visit a girl in her bedroom
– another, another each Saturday night –
and sense their wonder in the blessed darkness,
yes, when you lie with chests bare like sunlit slopes
where spring grass sprouts,
to test and love your own manhood,
I like you then,
and when you've found the one your blood longs for
and drives you toward, so that your hair shadows her face
– reeds over water, pine needles over sea –
I understand you then.
And I see a spark of the first love!
One day it will blaze through your entire being.

Sons of the north wind! Lovers of the south wind!
Knights of skiing and running!
When you come buzzing briskly down over hanging snowdrifts
and write with a bold language in the astonished snow,
when you come riding in a long race through the sparse forest
training horses of noble blood in the autumn day,

⁹⁵ From Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" (1920): "There died a myriad / And of the best, among them, / For an old bitch gone in the teeth, / For a botched civilization"

and when you rush by with a smile in your speeding wagons
– a streak of grease on an eager brow, hair flowing –
I like you then,
and when you, eagle-willed, take to the air
and dash like an arrow-quick bird of steel high over mountains and sea
and penetrate to ice-cold heights –
how I like you then!
Do you also know the dizzying flight – into
the heart of heaven?

Sowers for God and the world!
I see you out on open fields in spring
– sun over your sweaty faces and soil on your hands and feet –
when your hands scatter seeds in the vibrations of sowing
and the day puts gold in your raw plowshares,
I ask myself gladly:
are they also caring for an unseen field?
And when you build homes for women and children,
and when you raise solid walls in swarming cities
– great buildings, radiant buildings, quite useful to society –
how I love you then!
Are you building a spiritual society?

And you who span bridges across gaping abysses,
drill pathways through mountains and wellsprings in the wasteland
and victorious towers in the wilderness –
thank you for your sight!
Perhaps you one day yourself shall rise
like a mountain of benediction among desolate souls.

Oh children of the sun and light,
who have been so favored by nature!
I see you on golden shore by green seas,
you revere your bodies and love the sun.
I like you.
Do you also know the sun of truth
that burns at midnight?

Chapter Four

Rolf Jacobsen's Ragnarok: Modernism, Anti-Nihilism, and Redemptive Politics

“Come storm, come snow, come spring light,
come summer with sunshine.
We know that a world is blooming
behind the smoke from Ragnarok.”
- Rolf Jacobsen, 1943⁹⁶

Rolf Jacobsen's interwar poetry exemplifies the modernist impulse to create a new artistic language in response to the transformed conditions of urban and technological modernity. The two collections he published in the thirties, *Jord og Jern* (Earth and Iron, 1933) and *Vrimmel* (Swarm, 1935), broke with the Norwegian poetic tradition by drawing motifs from the banal surface of the modern city: asphalt, plate glass, railroads, airplanes, telephone poles, power lines, and newspapers.⁹⁷ This literary encounter with the machine age might occasionally suggest an aesthetic worship of speed, power, and mechanical form along the lines of other technophilic modernisms, such as Italian Futurism. But, as commentators on Jacobsen's poetry invariably observe, rather than a one-sided fascination with the machine aesthetic, a fundamental ambivalence lies at the heart of this encounter with technological modernity. For instance, the Danish critic Torben Brostrøm underscores Jacobsen's alienation in “modernity's double-world of quick satisfactions and deep lack” (*Stier* 33), while others emphasize the sense of melancholia, foreboding, and apprehension that accompany any perceptible enthusiasm.⁹⁸ Over the course of Jacobsen's poetic career, his initial ambivalence grows into a patently pessimistic stance toward modern technological civilization. This shift is noticeable already in *Vrimmel*, which was followed by a sixteen-year hiatus before his postwar poetic return, with *Fjerntog* (Distance Train, 1951) and the much-admired *Hemmelig liv* (Secret Life, 1954). These works begin to consolidate Jacobsen's position as a major Scandinavian writer – Norway's “most popular modernist”⁹⁹ – and an ecological poet known for his critique of consumerism, or what he saw as the Americanized *reklamesivilisasjon* (culture of advertising) (*Frøkorn* 19).

The facts of Jacobsen's support for National Socialism during the hiatus in his authorship – a troubling past that he refused to discuss honestly – were finally made clear to the public with the appearance of two biographies in 1998, four years after his death.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ “Kom storm, kom snø, kom vårlys, / kom sommer med solskinnsfokk. / Vi veit at en verden grønnes / bak røken fra Ragnarok.”

⁹⁷ Scholars often name the Danish poet Johannes V. Jensen's *Digte 1906* – especially the poem “Paa Memphis Station” – as an important Scandinavian source of inspiration. Jacobsen was also an admirer of Carl Sandburg's *Chicago Poems*, which he read in Swedish translation (Røsbak 113-114).

⁹⁸ Andreas Lombnæs offers another typical example: Jacobsen's “lyrical self is deeply fascinated by the new – by the beauty, power, and possibilities of the wonders of technology. It can seem like an excited optimism about the future, but only on the surface, for the hurried reading.” (“RJs lyriske jeg er dypt fascinert av det nye – av skjønnheten, kraften og mulighetene i teknikkens vidundre. Det kan fortone seg som begeistret fremtidsoptimisme, men bare på overflaten, for den hastige lesning.”) (Lombnæs 74).

⁹⁹ Brumo and Furuseth comment in *Norsk litterære modernisme* that Jacobsen “is without a doubt our most popular modernist” (94).

¹⁰⁰ These are Hanne Lillebo's *Ord må en omvei: en biografi om Rolf Jacobsen* and Ove Røsbak's *Rolf Jacobsen: En dikter og hans skygge*.

As the editor of *Kongsvinger Arbeiderbladet*, renamed *Glåmdalen* during the war, Jacobsen published almost 60 pro-Nazi editorials; he was also the propaganda leader for his local division of *Nasjonal Samling*. The poet was sentenced for treason after the occupation, although the judge found that he “belonged to the moderate wing of NS” (Lillebo 219). The biographical accounts give the sense of a sudden reversal after the German invasion, when Jacobsen joined the Norwegian fascist party despite his earlier leftist orientation. While this shift seems perplexing, Jacobsen’s radical politics of both left and right were based on consistent concerns: his opposition to Anglo-American liberal capitalism and his anxiety about present technological-industrial developments.

Jacobsen’s National Socialist sympathies have been bewildering to admirers of his poetry, which is almost never legible in terms of fascist aesthetics or ideology. Critics have rarely seen Jacobsen’s fascism as more than an untoward blunder, with little relevance for his career as a poet. From this perspective, it comes as a surprise that Jacobsen was featured in the wartime propaganda work *Nasjonalsosialister i norsk diktning* (National Socialists in Norwegian Literature). The article on Jacobsen there focuses on the metallic and modern functionalist aesthetic of his interwar work, using him to claim that National Socialist art is multifaceted, in that it embraces not only an aesthetic of nostalgic national romanticism, but also the work of “Rolf Jacobsen, the spokesman of the city, industry, iron, and metal” (Lillebo 195). Although this portrayal epitomizes the superficial reading of Jacobsen’s relation to technology, it also inclines us to ask how his poetry was connected to his political support for National Socialism. In what way might we understand Jacobsen’s fascism as something more than a temporary aberration with no relevance to his literary output? How are Jacobsen’s concerns as a modernist poet – his encounters with technology, modernity, and nihilism – connected to his political engagements, including his National Socialism?

To the extent that questions like these have even been raised, they have not been answered compellingly in discussions of Jacobsen. Critics and commentators have often been unwilling to recognize any lines of continuity between Jacobsen’s poetry and his politics.¹⁰¹ Partly this is because Jacobsen is a beloved figure, while fascism is an unsettling topic, but it also reflects the fact that his poetry differs stylistically from what is usually considered fascist. As a poet, Jacobsen produced complicated and image-rich texts with multiple meanings; his work cannot be unmasked as essentially proto-fascist through any type of suspicious reading method. In fact, a method of analysis that attempts to detect features of fascist ideology or aesthetics will not yield much of interest in Jacobsen’s poetry. However, the prevailing narrative of Jacobsen’s career is inadequate, because it is unable to account for his fascist interlude. Reigning methodological assumptions make it difficult to move beyond the idea of ‘reading for the fascist features,’ but this is not the only way to approach figures like Jacobsen.

Instead of locating fascism *in* Jacobsen’s modernist poetry, my argument underscores the concern with nihilism – the lack of a foundation for beliefs and actions, the lack of direction and commitment – that underlies both his poetry and his political engagements. I aim to reconsider Jacobsen’s political activities and their indirect relationship to his poetic imagination, without glossing over his National Socialism, but also without reducing his poetry to any single political discourse. To that end, I argue that

¹⁰¹ See Røsbak article “Ble aldri ferdig med krigen” (*Aftenposten* 5.21.07): “Det er rart at det i så liten grad blir trukket en linje mellom livet og verket til lyrikeren Rolf Jacobsen.”

Jacobsen's wartime support for National Socialism was more than a meaningless hiatus; it was based on his poetic critique of modernity's nihilism and it was part of his search for a way to overcome this cultural paradigm.

As Jacobsen himself admitted after the war, his political radicalism was motivated by a displaced religiosity, and he after the war ended up converting to Catholicism after his disillusionment with redemptive politics. Many of the pessimistic reservations about the culture of nihilism that motivated Jacobsen's grand political visions of the thirties and forties migrate into his postwar stance, a hybrid of Catholic and environmentalist critiques of (post)modernity. The difference is that the messianic longing no longer resides in secular politics, but is now housed in an actual religious discourse. In what follows, I examine how Jacobsen's interwar poetry encounters and recoils from what he perceived as the nihilism of technological modernity, how this was followed by his search for secular redemption in the form of utopian politics, and how his postwar poetic stance emerged from his disillusionment with political forms of salvation.

Interwar: Technology, Speed, Nihilism

“A new source of inspiration emerges, the incarnate symbol of our age itself, humanity's last fetish: the machine.”

– Haakon Bugge Mahrt, *Modernisme*, 1931¹⁰²

Jacobsen's work offers a variety of modernist poetic impulses, with strong hints of imagism, futurism, and expressionism. The poems in *Jord og Jern* and *Vrimmel* contain concrete and precise images of both urban spaces and natural landscapes; this has led critics to link Jacobsen to both imagism and “the new objectivity” (*Etterkrigs litteraturen* 201). Jacobsen's sober poetic perception of undistorted objects, even when it becomes somewhat mystical, offers a counterpoint to Sveen's intoxicated verse and to Hamsun's probing of the unconscious. Instead of psychological depth, his literary imagination is strikingly geographical and spatial, as some of his titles suggest: “Reise,” “Avstand,” “Europa,” and “Erosjon” (“Travel,” “Distance,” “Europe,” and “Erosion”). Futurist symbols and images appear frequently in Jacobsen's poems, for example “Flyvemaskiner” (“Flying Machines”), but not with the Futurists' unequivocal admiration for speed and machines over and against nature. His work from the thirties also shares many thematic features with expressionism, including its fixation on angst and alienation in urban and technological spaces (see for example “Signaler” in *Jord og Jern* and “Lysreklamen i skumringen” in *Vrimmel*).

Jacobsen's interwar poetry has been called a literary exploration of “technology's secret significance for modern life” (*Norsk litterære modernisme* 96). The early collections show that he was indeed captivated by the surface of the industrial urban environment. However, a prevalent critical commonplace insists on Jacobsen's ambivalence about technology and urban modernity: fascination is mixed with disquiet and reservations. Occasionally, his work attempts an imaginative synthesis of nature and technology, as in the incredible final poem in *Jord og Jern*, “Jernbaneland” (“Railroad Country”), which visualizes trains rhythmically stretching over the earth, bringing a “et

¹⁰² “Som ny inspirasjonskilde fremstaar selve vor tids inkarnerte symbol, menneskenes siste fetisch: maskinen.”

lite vers av stål og sten / i veiens store sang” (“little verse of steel and stone / in the railway’s mighty song”) (*North* 24-25).¹⁰³ However, the same text also expresses profound doubts about the ultimate impact of machinery and a growing awareness of the distress caused by technical-industrial advancement. In the culminating section of “Jernbaneland,” the railroad speaks the following prophetic words to mankind.

For det kommer nok en dag og det kommer nok en tid
da den jord hvor du trår er en brennende jord.
Og du rømmer fra dig selv og da kommer du til mig
på min flukt over syngende spor.

Og du finner ikke ro og du leter overalt
gjennom tider og land i en rivende strøm.
Og du hører mine hjul som en tromme i ditt blod
på din jakt mot den ytterste drøm.

(For there will surely come a day and there will surely come a time / when the earth underfoot will be burning coals. / And you’ll flee from yourself and then you’ll come to me / in my flight over singing rails. // And you won’t find any peace, you’ll be searching everywhere / across ages and lands: a torrential stream. / And you’ll listen to my wheels like a drumming in your blood / while you hunt for the ultimate dream.) (*North* 26-27)

Jacobsen suggests here that modernity’s technological utopianism – its “ultimate dream” – creates a feverish march (“en tromme i ditt blod”), an unmanageable process of disruption and mobility, a hunt that leads nowhere.

As this indicates, the emergent cultural critique in Jacobsen’s interwar work reflects his awareness (1) that technology, despite its enthralling facade, has become an uncontrolled and out-of-balance force, and (2) that modernity, despite its seductive freedom, actually entails a loss of meaning – an uneasy cultural condition of nihilism in which something has been forgotten. Later, from his postwar environmental perspective, Jacobsen understands this loss as the collective forgetting of humanity’s profound dependence on nature (*Etterkrigslitteraturen* 208). For instance, the 1956 poem “Grønt lys” (“Green Light”) declares, “for dette har vi glemt, at Jorden er en stjerne av gress, / en frø-planét, rykende av sporer som skyer, fra hav til hav, / et fokk” (“for we have forgotten this: that the Earth is a star of grass, / a seed-planet, swirling with spores as with clouds, from sea to sea, / a whirl of them”) (*North* 106-107). I will return to Jacobsen’s postwar work below.

Jord og Jern announced its cutting-edge style and subject matter with a sleek functionalist cover design. This collection is divided into two parts that correspond to the title’s nature/culture contrast: “Skyggene” (“The Shadows”) contains timeless natural landscape poems, while “Morgenfrost” (“Morning Frost”) consists of present-day technologized landscapes. While one might discern a simple opposition between nature

¹⁰³ I will sometimes quote from Roger Greenwald’s excellent bilingual edition of selected poems, *North in the World*, but some important poems for my argument are not included there. In those cases, I will offer literal translations of my own.

and technology, critics as early as Sigurd Hoel have seen that the two different kinds of landscape are treated in parallel (Lillebo 88). Jacobsen claimed that the collection, with its juxtaposition of primordial landscapes inspired by the Poetic Edda with metropolitan, industrial landscapes, was based on the idea of similarity rather than contrast (98). Along with his usage of new industrial motifs and a new poetic rhythm, the critical reception has focused on Jacobsen's linkage of natural and technological imagery as an original and characteristic feature of his modernism (*Stier* 53).

Looking back at *Jord og Jern* in 1978, Jacobsen said that readers had neglected that it is a kind of creation narrative ("en slags skapelsesberetning") (*Frøkorn* 24). The collection was originally called "Begynnelsen" ("The Beginning"), and the first several poems evoke a mood of awe and astonishment in a prehistoric landscape. "Regn" ("Rain") commences the collection with these lines:

Himmelen har stillet sin harpe på skrå mot jorden
og rører de tusen strenger med døvende vellyd,
løfter de store klemt over skog og sletter
med lekende hender.

...

Regn var det første. Øglene bet mot regn.
Langsmed de støvgrå sumper gynget de fuktige trær.
Papegøiene kaklet. Himmelens flyvefisker
rodde sig skrikende frem
gjennom regn.

...

Regn var det første sansene skjønnte på jorden
– susende regn.

(The sky has rested its harp aslant on the earth / and is moving the thousands of strings in deafening harmony, / lofting great chords above forest and steppe / with playful hands ... Rain was the first thing. The dinosaurs snapped at rain. / Humid trees swayed beside dust-gray swamps. / Parrots cackled. The flying fish of the sky / paddled forward, shrieking / through rain ... Rain was the first thing the senses grasped on the earth / – rushing rain.) (*North* 4-5)

After "Regn" comes a poem appropriately entitled "Floden" ("The Flood"), and then the text that Åsmund Sveen selected for his wartime propaganda anthology *Norsk ånd og vilje*, "Ophav" ("Origin"). The second half of "Ophav" calls to mind a silence at the world's beginning and portrays the forest as a location that preserves this ancient wonder.

Jeg våknet i frost
og så i halvdrom en fugl lette mot himlen.
En fugl med tordnende vinger.
Granen.

Og det var ingen annen lyd på jorden.

– Det var bare skogen som snakket til mig
om det som var hendt her,
fra tidens morgen og frem til den
ytterste dag.
(*Alle mine dikt* 17)

(I awoke in frost / and, half-dreaming, saw a bird rising toward the sky. / A bird
with thunderous wings. / The spruce. // And there was no other sound on the
earth. // – It was only the forest speaking to me / about what has happened here, /
from the dawn of time and forward on / to judgment day.) (My translation)

Sveen probably chose this poem for his National Socialist anthology because it can be read as an example of Norwegian forest mysticism, one of his favored topics. In contrast to Sveen's and Hamsun's forest intoxication, however, Jacobsen's poetry does not involve the vitalistic body or the unconscious; as Greenwald notes, it is about attunement to one's surroundings and reverence for the natural world (*North* xvii). Rather than Dionysian abandon in the eroticized wilderness, Jacobsen's nature poems offer a paler, more sober mood of contemplation. "Ophav," with the image of the spruce tree as a gigantic rising bird, confers on the forest a kind of subjectivity and also a language of its own. The forest will speak about its enduring secrets, the poem suggests, if you are silently receptive to its language. As I discuss below, in Jacobsen's uncollected wartime poetry the theme of dawn and the end of time takes on new significance in relation to his fascist apocalypticism – this time through the lens of the pagan Ragnarok rather than the Christian judgment day ("den ytterste dag").

In *Jord og Jern*, a less obvious type of creation narrative involves the techno-industrial landscapes. Asbjørn Aarnes has argued that Jacobsen's placement of images of technological creation in parallel to primordial nature implies that the machines, power lines, and trains are also part of an inaugurative force beyond human subjectivity. Among the machines of iron, as in the extra-human workings of nature, something is happening, emerging, creating itself; this process exceeds the limits of the individual subject's knowledge or intentions (Aarnes 63). In its depictions of both natural and technological landscapes, writes Aarnes, *Jord og Jern* "reveals an area where consciousness is absent, the subject-independent world of things" (65). Jacobsen's parallelism of the primordial and the technological is perhaps most apparent in the poem "Industridistrikt" ("Industrial District").

Det er i jordens oldtid
– at ditt vindu lukkes op mot morgenen
i murbergene
og knirker på sine hasper
og slipper inn lukten av kalk og ny brand
mot dine varme laken,

– at ditt øre fanger den langsomme lyd
av en dampmaskin like i nærheten,
lufthamrenes gjø over taken

den hule hoste fra gater du ikke kan se gjennom røken,

– at ditt øie møter de store
marker av ull,
jernvanger, tomter med koks
under sparsom sol. Fabrik-
skorstener med kroner av gul røk,
– at ditt hjerte brister i drøm:
Dinosaurene, hornøglene,
løfter de tynne halser over for-
stenede sumper
og gresser
i skyenes tak av løv,

– at din tanke med ett fylles av lys og våkner:
'Idag skal jeg ut og kjøpe nye sko.'

(It is in the earth's prehistory / – that your window is opened to morning / amid mountains of walls / and creaks on its hinges / and lets the smell of lime and new fire drift in / toward your warm sheets, // – that your ear catches the slow sound / of a steam engine nearby, / of jackhammers barking over the roofs, / the hollow cough from streets you can't see through the smoke, / – that your eye meets the vast / fields of dust, / iron meadows, lots with coke / under thin sun. Factory / chimneys with yellow crowns of smoke / – that your heart bursts into dream: / The dinosaurs, the horned lizards, / raise their thin necks over / petrified swamps / and graze / in the canopy of leafy clouds, / – that your mind is filled at once with light and awakens: / "Today I'm going out and buying new shoes.") (*North* 18-19)

The poem opens by situating itself in the primordial phase of the world, but it is soon revealed that this dawn is actually just the start of a modern day in an urban-industrial locale. The addressee of the poem awakens to the noisy sounds of machines and the sight of factory smoke choking the streets – lines that suggest a dystopian possibility of the industrial society. Then the waking person, upon seeing the "fields of dust, / iron meadows, lots with coke," dreams up a landscape populated by dinosaurs and ancient lizards, creating the link between the technological modern and a prehistorical moment of the past. A similar image of machines as large animals returns in the well-known "Landskap med gravemaskiner" ("Landscape with Steam Shovels"), from *Secret Life* (1954). In the postwar poem, technology has become a thoroughly destructive force: the deformed creatures are "eating up my woods" and creating "some sort of hell" (*North* 66-67). In the interwar poem, however, the dystopian possibility fades away as the awakening person decides to fulfill a banal commercial task in the space of the modern city by purchasing new shoes.

Another poem from the second half of *Jord og Jern*, "Speilglass" ("Plate Glass"), takes the space and experience of urban commodity culture as its main theme. The speaker likens a trip through the city on a streetcar to an underwater journey into an uncanny, but congenial world of artificial satisfactions.

På vår seilas med trikken
ut til løvetann og syriner
ble vi sittende fast i speilglass
i en lang osende kanal.
Vi la et blått kjølvann bak oss
gjennom rutenes blinkende brenning
da vi ble hyllet inn i skygge
og så var vi på byens havbunn.

Over takenes bølgetopper
så vi maisolen lyse,
men i de hemmelighetsfulle sunkne paradiser
så vi unge piker av voks.

I de strålende, fortyllende akvarier
lå gaudaostenes gule møllestener,
røkelaks
og sprø, duftende roquefort med grønne perler.
Og bak de stirrende speilglass-øine
(fuktige av gatens gjennomtrekk)
korsetletter, min herre,
og bysteholdere av silkerips.

La løvetannen lyse.
La trikken seile med sitt kjølvann.
– Jeg er strandet på et koralrev
og lar havets champagne bevifte mine gjellespalter.

(On our sailing trip by trolley / out to dandelions and lilacs / we got stuck in plate glass / in a long streaming canal. / As we left a blue wake behind us / through the glittering swell of the panes, / we were enveloped in shadow / and ended up on the city's seabed. // Above the wave-crests of the roofs / we saw the May sun shining, / but in the mysterious sunken paradise / we saw young girls of wax. // In the sparkling, bewitched aquariums / lay yellow millstones of Gouda cheese, / smoked salmon, / and crumbling, fragrant Roquefort beaded with dew. / And behind the staring plateglass eyes / (watering from the draft) / corsets, dear sir, / and brassieres of ribbed silk. // Let the dandelions shine. / Let the trolley sail on with its wake. / – I am stranded on a coral reef / and let the sea's champagne flutter the slits of my gills.) (*North* 14-15)

“Speilglass” is one of Jacobsen’s few carefree depictions of the pleasures on offer in the new landscapes of modernity. Through the defamiliarizing glitter of reflective glass, the speaker experiences an unreal undersea paradise, in which the shop-window mannequins

are seen as “girls of wax.”¹⁰⁴ Being “stranded” in this eroticized world of fashion and consumption, with its gourmet delicacies and silken undergarments, may even be preferable to nature’s dandelions and lilacs. The text’s lighthearted aestheticization of the city’s “sunken paradise” of champagne and boutique windows stands in stark contrast to other interwar poems that are more typical in their treatment of urban angst and nihilism.

While the surface satisfactions of the city’s commodity culture are unreal and dream-like in a positive, enchanting manner in “Speilglass,” this very unreality becomes the target of Jacobsen’s social critique in “Virkelighet” (“Reality”) from *Vrimmel*.

Dagen vi klynger oss til:
Butikkene hvor vi kjøper vakre klær. Reiser vi skal
gjøre om en tid.
Gatenes tummel. Regnet som faller på fortauene i
skumringen er drøm.
Natten og søvnløsheten.
Pengesorgene.
Lykken som ikke kommer er virkelighet.

Tryggheten fra de store, brusende forsamlinger.
Farten.
Orkestrenes brøl og de tykke spennende aviser er drøm og skygge.
Øinene på ham som ber.
Hendene på ham som fryser.
Trampet fra alle de masser som driver
sultne omkring i storbyene
er virkelighet.

De langvarige, interessante debatter. Argumentene
(på den ene side og på den annen side).
Katetrene, prestene, trompetfanfarene.
Trommen, takten, strømmen som driver oss fremover er drøm.
Maskingeværene.
Blod-engene og sølen. Skriket da du
en aften våkner til smertene.
Lasarettene sne.
Massegravene, er virkelighet.

Torven som gror.
Gresstråene som bøier sig mykt i vinden.
Bølgenes sang
er virkelighet.
(*Alle mine dikt* 56-57)

¹⁰⁴ This line takes on an added significance in light of Mark Sandberg’s work on the turn-of-the-century wax museum display and its connection to the experience of the urban uncanny (Sandberg 119).

(The day we cling to: / Shops where we buy nice clothes. Journeys we will / soon take. / The clamor in the streets. The rain falling on sidewalks / at dusk is a dream. / The night and sleeplessness. / Worries about money. / Happiness that doesn't come is reality. // Safety in the large, roaring crowds. / Speed. / The orchestras' howling and the thick exciting newspapers are dream and shadow. / The eyes of the praying man. / The hands of the freezing man. / The trudging of all those masses that wander / around starving in the big cities / is reality. // The long, interesting debates. The arguments / (on one hand and on the other hand) / The lecterns, the priests, the trumpets' fanfares. / The drumming, the rhythm, the rush driving us forward / is dream. / The machine guns. / The bloody fields and mud. Your cry when / one night you awake suffering. / The snow on field hospitals. / The mass graves, are reality. // The turf growing. / Leaves of grass bending softly in the wind. / The song of the waves / is reality.) (My translation)

In this solemn text, all the pessimistic reservations about modern culture that hover tacitly over Jacobsen's first two collections are voiced quite directly. Shopping, travel, leisure, speed, news media, public assemblies, political debates, the stream of progress – all are part of the phantasmagorical exterior of modern life. Such phenomena are reduced to smokes and mirrors covering over desperation, hunger, and terror. “Virkelighet” reveals Jacobsen's perception of the true, annihilating core of modernity – that underneath all the chatter is a violent emptiness. The rush of progress is a fantasy; what's true according to this 1935 poem is Europe's barbaric regression in the rawness of war. The text's concluding reference to bloody fields, military hospitals, and mass graves shows the lingering impact of the collective trauma of World War I and the trench experience, even in the imagination of a younger poet from a neutral country. But, in its final statement of what is real, the poem turns to the enduring remedy of the unpeopled natural landscape: the grass blowing softly in the wind, the song of the waves. At this moment, we catch an early glimpse of Jacobsen's postwar ecological message.

That nature outlasts the vacuous hustle and bustle of modern civilization is also the message of the final poem in *Vrimmel*, “Myrstrå vipper.” This poem mocks the vain world of toothpaste and gramophones, of crowds, superficiality, and routine: the cities “hvor menneskene stimer på fortauene og ser hva de andre har på sig” (“where people swarm on the sidewalks and look at what others are wearing”). In a typical *vanitas* manner, the poem looks toward death and imagines empty fields – “ødemarkene” – that will outlive the annihilation of a bankrupt human culture. An abrupt temporal shift forward in the middle of the poem evokes a future in which technology is in ruins and people are absent.

- Femti år og andre bor i husene,
sporvognene har nye skilt og nytt
skinn på setene.
- Hundre år og bilene er stanset i lange
rekker, side om side står de i evige
karavaner, dynger sig op i store hauger,
ligger med hjulene i været som døde insekter.
- Tusen år og jernbjelken er en rød

stripe i sanden.
(*Alle mine dikt* 81)

(– Fifty years and other people live in the houses / the streetcars have new signs and new / leather on the seats. / – A hundred years and the cars have come to a halt in long / rows, side by side they stand in eternal / caravans, piling up in great heaps, / lying with their wheels in the air like dead insects. – A thousand years and the iron beam is a red / stripe in the sand.) (My translation)

Jacobsen uses this imagined perspective from an uninhabited future to unveil the transience of the modern life the poem derides. His fast-forward shows automobiles – futurist symbols of modernity’s liberating speed and intoxicating freedom from the past – as rusted remains of a vanished civilization.

In a little-known 1931 work entitled *Modernisme*, the Norwegian author Haakon Bugge Mahrt claimed that speed (*farten, hastigheten*) was central to the experience of the modern. He wrote that “vor mentalitet er uophørlig rettet mot hastigheten” (“our mentality is relentlessly directed at speed”) and that this obsession, along with technology, produces an existential unease in our lives (qtd. in Brumo 60). Mahrt compared speed to an addictive substance that caused people to overestimate their own capacities (Brumo 61-62). When Jacobsen relegates “speed” and “progress” to realm of false fantasy, as he does in “Virkelighet,” he unmasks two major ideals of technological modernity. The poem “Nitti Kilometer” (“Ninety Kilometers”) shows how distinct Jacobsen’s work is from any technophilic form of modernism, even as it depicts the intoxication of speed.

Å stupe ned
gjennom aftenrøden
mot andre lande
på flukt mot dagen
mens stunden brenner
til aske bak dig
med høie flammer.

Å høre glefset
av motormunnen
mot veiens kurve
mens landet kommer
med favnen åpen,
med nye steder
du ikke kjenner
med trær og tårner
imot ditt hjerte.

Å flenge natten
med gylne kniver
og jage skyggen

til døde forut
til dagen løfter
de hvite bryster
imot din lebe.

– Den lyst er iskold
og dyp som døden
og ensomheten.

...
Ja, skynd dig skynd dig
og favn det heftig
ditt bleke bytte
med lydløs jubel,

– for bak dig brenner –
en drøm til aske
med røde flammer – –
(*Alle mine dikt* 31-32)

(– To plunge down / through the sunset glow / on to other lands / in flight toward day / while the moments burn / to ash behind you / with tall flames. // – To hear the bark / of the motor’s mouth / towards the curving road / as the land approaches / with open embrace, / with new places / you do not know / with trees and towers / against your heart. // – To slash the night / with golden knives / and hunt the shadow / to death until / the day lifts up / its white breasts / against your lips. // That pleasure is ice-cold / and deep as death / and solitude ... So hurry up, hurry up / embrace it fiercely / your pale plunder / with soundless joy / – for it’s burning behind you – / a dream to ashes / with red flames – –) (My translation)

As in “Jernbaneland,” the initial exhilaration of speed sours in the course of the poem into a violent and ghostly pursuit. The motorcar racing through an endless landscape, always fleeing (“på flukt”) towards the seduction of the new, presents a image of what the Futurists called simultaneity (Lombnæs 75). While the poem imagines the car as an assertive animal (“glefset” is a dog’s noise) in search of novelty and power, it does not simply praise the eroticized violence as beautiful or liberating. Rather, Jacobsen focuses on the destructive effects of the machine’s flight. As John Brumo observes in an article about speed in interwar Norwegian poetry, “in the wake of the intoxicating and erotic experience of speed there clearly follows an element of loss and destruction” (72). This flight, though sexy, is an “ice-cold” pleasure, like death and solitude, that is burning “a dream to ashes” behind it. “Nitti Kilometer” does not celebrate the futurist wish to escape history and destroy the past; rather, it allegorizes uprooting and destruction in a movement forward that is both hyperactive and passionless. The intoxication is over: modernity’s speed means perpetual loss and disaffection.

Whatever initial ambivalent fascination Jacobsen’s interwar work expresses is eventually overshadowed by his grave doubts. A blunt critique of technological modernity supplants his poetic infatuation with metropolitan space in “Speilglass” and

with the railway journey in “Jernbaneland.” In the course of the thirties and after, Jacobsen adopts an anxiously pessimistic stance toward the culture of nihilism, the degradation of life saturated by speed and noise. This critical view becomes increasingly apparent after Jacobsen’s postwar poetic return, in collections such as *Hemmelig liv*, (*Secret Life* 1954) and *Stillheten etterpå* (*The Silence Afterwards* 1967). While establishing Jacobsen as one of the major Scandinavian poets, these works also begin to cement his ecological critique of postwar Western consumerist culture.

What has been missing from the usual narrative of Jacobsen’s career is an account of the connection between this sort of poetry and his fascist interlude. By pointing this out, I do not mean that we need an ideologically suspicious interpretation that reveals an inbuilt fascist tendency in Jacobsen’s poetry before or after the war. Rather, we need a more continuous narrative – one that can explain his wartime collaboration as something other than a baffling deviation. The following quotation from Ivar Havnevik’s 2002 history *Dikt i Norge* (Poetry in Norway) typifies the standard approach to the issue:

[Etter *Vrimmel*] kommer det ikke flere bøker før krigsutbruddet, og Jacobsen arbeider da som journalist. Og plutselig finner vi ham som nazi-innsatt redaktør for avisen *Glåmdalen* på Kongsvinger. Selv sa han i et intervju mange år senere at det var om å gjøre for ham å drive den vanlige sosialdemokratiske journalistikken videre inne i avisen, selv om han brukte forsiden til nyheter fra NS-regimet i Oslo. Dette er bare delvis riktig, og han ble dømt til straffarbeid i 1945. (Havnevik 341)

([After *Vrimmel*] there are no more books before the war breaks out, and Jacobsen then works as a journalist. And suddenly we find him as a Nazi-appointed editor of the newspaper *Glåmdalen* in Kongsvinger. He said himself in an interview many years later that it was important for him to carry forward the newspaper’s standard Social Democratic journalism, even though he used the front page for news from the NS regime in Oslo. This is only partly true, and he was sentenced to hard labor in 1945.)

The description then jumps ahead to 1951, when *Fjerntog* was published. The reader never hears in what sense Jacobsen’s statement was only “partly true” or what his collaboration, trial for treason, imprisonment, hard labor penalty, and eventual conversion to Catholicism meant for his work. The latter are evidently considered to belong to “the private Rolf Jacobsen,” not his poetry (346). This quotation also makes it seem like ‘fascism’ is something that happens *to* Jacobsen, not something that he chooses for reasons that we might investigate.

Havnevik reasonably points out that neither Jacobsen’s National Socialism nor his Catholicism show up often as explicit themes in his poetry, and he stresses that “diktene er blottet for nazistiske holdninger” (“the poems are devoid of Nazi opinions”). But I hope to question the methodological assumption that the only way for Jacobsen’s National Socialism to be relevant to his literary career is for something called “Nazi opinions” to surface unmistakably in his poems. Furthermore, it seems that for critics like Havnevik, Jacobsen’s politics are relevant only when ‘safe’ – when he is the youthful socialist or the later “critic of Western consumer society ... and of American, imperialistic warfare” (346). You can almost hear the implied readers cheering when

Havnevik writes this – thankfully the beloved poet made up for that nasty business during the war by becoming anti-American and anti-consumerist afterwards. (These positions were by no means inherently non-fascist.) The rather predictable conclusion is that Jacobsen’s National Socialism was a “wrong choice during the occupation – five years of a life” and merely “the result of a temporary deviation, along with a kind of opportunism completely separate from his ‘real’ opinions before and after the war” (346).¹⁰⁵ (Five years as a Nazi – *those* five years – strikes me as a significant amount of time.) This perspective reflects a larger pattern of response to Jacobsen’s wartime collaboration; it is unsatisfactory because it implies that Norway’s foremost twentieth-century poet can “suddenly” become a fascist for several years without this exerting some contextual pressure on our understanding of his work.

By situating Jacobsen’s poetry and politics in a narrative sequence of uneasy nihilism followed by a vision of redemption – modernist chaos followed by fascist recentering – my analysis aims to offer a needed reconsideration of how the normally glossed-over National Socialist hiatus fits into his career. The continuity in Jacobsen – including his fascist politics, his modernist poetics, and his later hybrid Catholic-green stance – lies in his sustained response to modernity’s culture of nihilism. To explain this further, let me turn now to two different ways that Jacobsen sought to resist or overcome nihilism: one poetic, one political. First, I will consider the idea that the aesthetic itself, and especially a certain type of poetic language, offers a type of resistance to nihilism. Following that, I hope to show that Jacobsen’s turn to fascism was also a form of anti-nihilism: a post-Death-of-God attempt at metaphysical and moral re-grounding.

Aesthetic Anti-Nihilism

Generally speaking, literary modernism set its mode of aesthetic perception not only in opposition to tradition, but also to modernity’s rational and instrumentalizing approach to the world; it offered instead a model of heightened sensitivity that could ‘take in’ more than the everyday consciousness.¹⁰⁶ In Norwegian literature, both Hamsun and the poet Sigbjørn Obstfelder were proponents of an early modernist literature of the nerves. Obstfelder wrote that he worked “med alle Dele af min Organisme, med Sanserne, som direkte forholder sig til Materien, med Nervene – ja med alt sammen” (“with all parts of my organism, with the senses, which relate directly to the material substance, with the nerves – indeed, with everything”) (qtd. in *Norsk litterære modernisme* 107). Jacobsen described his poetic activity in terms of ‘receptivity’ and ‘attunement.’ Using a radio metaphor, he wrote that poets are attuned in an unusual way, with an “extra-receptive disposition, a slightly longer antenna that can receive other stations,” and he claimed that “the poet is a person with twice as many nerves” (*Frøkokorn* 27, 28). Jacobsen’s poetic self-description relies on the fin-de-siècle idea of artistic perception as a form of neuraesthesia, which he interestingly combines with the technological trope of the radio that can receive unfamiliar stations.

¹⁰⁵ “Om vi kan slutte noe av det, må det være at hans feilvalg under okkupasjonen – fem år av et liv – har vært resultat av et midlertidlig avvik, sammen med en slags opportunisme helt på siden av hans ‘egentlige’ holdninger før og etter krigen.” (Havnevik 346)

¹⁰⁶ The authors of *Norsk litterære modernisme* observe that “kunstnerens persepsjon krever i økende grad frihet fra tradisjonen, [and also from] det rasjonelle og instrumentelle” (*Norsk litterære modernisme* 107). See also Sara Danius’s interesting revision of this view of modernist perception in *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics*.

Norwegian scholars have repeatedly read Jacobsen in terms of Martin Heidegger's later writings on poetry, technology, and Being; they suggest that as a poet he replicates many of the philosopher's concerns. Although Jacobsen did not share Heidegger's philosophical critique of modernity in any detailed way, there are some interesting parallels that these interpretations have brought to light. Jacobsen's poetry attempts to overcome the modern paradigm of nihilism by using language as a vehicle that registers awe and astonishment at being itself. From the Heideggerian perspective, technological nihilism is the *absence* of such a primal encounter with being, which Jacobsen achieves through poetic listening. Like Heidegger, Jacobsen is not opposed to specific technologies, but to the situation of technological nihilism, which Hubert Dreyfus summarizes as "the human distress caused by the technological understanding of being, rather than the destruction caused by specific technologies" (305).

Heidegger locates nihilism in the forgetting of the difference between Being itself and 'beings' as objects (nihilism as *Seinsvergessenheit*). The modern technological organization of the world represents the culmination of this objectification of Being in the tradition of Western metaphysics. In "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger describes the essence of technology as an "enframing" (*das Gestell*) that organizes the world – nature and the human – into a 'standing reserve' (*Bestand*) of measurable and manipulable objects. In Heidegger's words,

Enframing does not simply endanger man in his relationship to himself and to everything that is. As a destining, it banishes man into that kind of revealing which is an ordering. Where this ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing. Above all, Enframing conceals that revealing which, in the sense of *poiesis*, lets what presences come forth into appearance. (*Question 27*)¹⁰⁷

In this account, "enframing," in its dangerous capacity to alienate and uproot humanity further from "Being," is a result of the modern metaphysics of the subject. In his later writings on language, dwelling, and thinking, Heidegger elevates poetry as an essential activity of language that offers a space of resistance to the technological in this sense. The poet is the one who makes room in language for the 'unconcealment' of Being; that is what poetry is for. As we see in the above quotation, this poetic way of maintaining contact with 'the clearing' stands in opposition to the technological danger of the total ordering of Being in *das Gestell* (the enframing). Heidegger's understanding of the poetic can be seen as an instance of a more widespread phenomenon in modern aesthetic thought: the attempt to describe the value of art in terms of its power to resist nihilism (Weller ix). Heideggerian 'poetic thinking' counteracts the nihilism of calculative, technological thinking and thus prepares a space for a new, more authentic relationship to Being (Denker 33).

In accordance with this theorization of the poetic, several interesting academic studies of Jacobsen have interpreted his poetic activity, both pre- and post-war, as a form

¹⁰⁷ "Allein das Ge-stell gefährdet nicht nur den Menschen in seinem Verhältnis zu sich selbst und zu allem, was ist. Als Geschick verweist es in das Entbergen von der Art des Bestellens. Wo dieses herrscht, vertreibt es jede andere Möglichkeit der Entbergung. Vor allem verbirgt das Ge-stell jenes Entbergen, das im Sinne der *poietis* das Anwesende ins Erscheinen her-vor-kommen läßt." (*Die Frage nach der Technik.*)

of anti-nihilism. They often rely on the above-mentioned idea of the poet's different kind of aesthetic 'attunement,' and they explain Jacobsen's poetic stance of 'listening' or 'receptivity' in terms derived from Heidegger. One critic argues that Jacobsen's poetic discourse endeavors to resist modernity's technological snowball of noise and acceleration by remaining attuned to what has been forgotten: the lost wisdom of being and nature (Lombnæs 72-87). Another, Asbjørn Aarnes, claims that Jacobsen's poetic stance towards technology is basically similar to Heidegger's in "The Question Concerning Technology." He reads Jacobsen's poetic project as a form of what Heidegger called *Gelassenheit* – the stance of 'letting things be' in their uncertainty rather than representing and mastering them as objects of technological manipulation. Jacobsen's poetry enacts this sort of meditative thinking and to offer the non-humanist insight that "there is something that transcends subjectivity, something we must relate to by 'letting be' or listening" (Aarnes 63).

Lastly, the scholar Erling Aadland has written a book-length study of Jacobsen's 'poetic thinking.'¹⁰⁸ He argues that Jacobsen's fundamental project as a poet was to listen in astonishment for the event of Being – its 'unconcealment': "the poem arises in silence, and the poet is a listener" (Aadland 20).¹⁰⁹ Jacobsen's poetic receptivity differs from the traditional understanding of poetic creativity, according to Aadland, in that the poetic act is not imagination originating and centered in a subject, but rather an attempt to eschew the metaphysics of the subject and to listen for something more primary than the subject-object split: the phenomenon of being itself. This argument echoes Heidegger's pastoral stylization of the authentic poet as the 'shepherd of Being' – the one who watches over Being, makes dwelling possible, the opposite of the technological subject.

These brief and rapid summaries show that the critical discourse on Jacobsen has repeatedly conceptualized his poetic activity as an attempt to counteract the nihilistic forgetting of Being and to offer an alternative to the degradations of technological reason. Jacobsen's stance of poetic listening implicitly challenges the paradigm of technological nihilism, which Heidegger saw as the total forgetting of being in the modern, instrumentalizing approach to the world. Interesting as they are, these readings, like most studies of Jacobsen, neglect to consider his political context, even as they employ the ideas of a thinker with a comparable fascist 'stain.' Heidegger's understanding of technology enabled him dubiously to proclaim that Americanism and Communism were "metaphysically speaking" identical, in that they both exemplified "the same hopeless frenzy of unchained technology" (from *Introduction to Metaphysics*, qtd. in Weller 39). In another widely known and vexing statement, Heidegger claimed that the Nazi extermination camps and the mechanization of food production were "in essence" equivalent (qtd. in *Five Portraits*, 60). In such cases, Heidegger's critique of modernity stunningly avoids any common-sensical distinctions between the effects of the technological. This discourse has what Michael André Bernstein memorably calls "the glamour of metaphysical melodrama" but many readers find it compromised by its oblivion of more mundane political and moral distinctions (*Five Portraits* 61, 76).

¹⁰⁸ The title of Aadland's study of "Poetisk tenkning" in Jacobsen's poetry, "*Forundring. Trofasthet*," is a quotation from Jacobsen's poem "Katakombene i San Callisto" (*Brev til lyset*, 1960).

¹⁰⁹ Aadland aligns Jacobsen's 'poetic thinking' with the Heideggerian idea of the poet as the one who makes room in language for the 'unconcealment' of being: "Die Dichtung ist die Sage der Unverborgenheit des Seienden" (Heidegger, *Holzwege*, qtd. in Aadland, 35).

My main point about Heidegger's Nazism is fairly non-controversial: in 1933, the year that Heidegger became the rector of the University of Freiburg, he understood National Socialism as a means of overcoming nihilism. Dreyfus suggests that Heidegger's diagnosis of nihilism led him to expect a "renewing event" that would overcome the crisis of the West and provide it with an understanding of Being that involves awe and mystery (310-313). Heidegger's political engagement was in this sense "predicated upon his interpretation of the situation in the West as technological nihilism, and of National Socialism as a new paradigm" to counteract this situation (311). In 1936, Heidegger referred to Mussolini and Hitler in a lecture as "the two men who in different ways introduced a countercurrent to nihilism" (Wolin 220). However, by the end of the 1930s and the time of his Nietzsche studies, Heidegger abandoned this understanding of fascism, or any type of politics, as such a countercurrent (Dreyfus 311; Denker 25; Wolin 7). He eventually came to think of National Socialism not as a solution to, but as "the most extreme expression" of technological nihilism (Dreyfus 312). What I would like to preserve for my analysis of Jacobsen from this limited comparison with Heidegger is the narrative arc of an encounter with modern European nihilism that sets the stage for a temporary vision of National Socialist redemption.

Political Anti-Nihilism

In April of 1940, Norway was invaded by Nazi Germany, and the leader of the miniscule Norwegian fascist party, Vidkun Quisling, was announced as the new chief of government. After the fall of Norway, all political parties except for *Nasjonal Samling* were banned, but not all Norwegians joined the party, as Jacobsen did on his own initiative in October 1940 (Lillebo 176; Røsbak 169). By the beginning of the new year he was the editor of a Nazified newspaper, which received instructions from the German press directorate; during the war he also worked as the press and propaganda leader in the Kongsvinger division of *Nasjonal Samling*. In this section, I will summarize Jacobsen's political biography and provide textual evidence – both journalism and poetry – for my claim that his National Socialism was a form of political anti-nihilism.

In the early thirties, Jacobsen was a member of the socialist organization Clarté and involved with the radical *Mot Dag* group, which at the time included many of Norway's leading intellectuals. During his visit to Germany in 1934, Jacobsen reacted positively to Berlin as a cultural metropolis, but negatively to the new regime. He attended an anti-Nazi seminar shortly after his return. Although he shared certain interests with the *Mot Dag* communists – he was actively engaged with social issues, working conditions, poverty, and 'the industrial question' – he never became an orthodox Marxist intellectual (Røsbak 122-123).

Jacobsen's poetry rarely reflected his leftist stance openly, as did the work of other Norwegian poets such as the key interwar figures Arnulf Øverland and Nordahl Grieg. His engagement was only occasionally visible in his literature, as in the poem "Brosten" ("Bricks") from *Vrimmel*. In the second half of the decade, Jacobsen published a few tendentious and formally conventional poems à la Øverland. One of these uncollected texts, published in *Kongsvinger Arbeiderbladet* in 1936, speaks of red flags, solidarity, and a future to come after the burning night of the world's struggle and despair (Røsbak 124). In contrast to the later fascist context of his images of renewal, at this point Jacobsen's invocation of "den nye tid som gryr" ("the new age that is dawning") still

referred to a dream modelled on the Soviet Union. In the 1937 article “Comrades” (“Kamarater”) he called Soviet Russia “et veldig håpets land som vokser i styrke og rikdom for hver dag som går” (“a great land of hope whose strength and wealth are increasing every day”) (Røsbak 127). This was the time of Stalin’s “Great Purge” and the Moscow show trials, but Jacobsen probably would have viewed descriptions of these events as part of a conspiracy against the Soviet Union.

Another of Jacobsen’s tendentious poems, “Konjunktur” (“Conjuncture”) was printed in the newspaper *Dagbladet* in February 1937. The poem depicts exhausted workers leaving a steel factory as the mechanized production rushes along according to its own schedule.

Dag efter dag og natt efter natt
jager fabrikkenes hjul som besatt.
Arbeiderne raver dødstrette hjem
men nye tusen tar fatt efter dem.

...

Stål noteres i 175 prosent i New York og Berlin.
(*Dagbladet* 2.20.1937).

(Day after day and night after night / the wheels of the factory drive as if possessed. / The workers stagger home dead-tired / but thousands of new ones set to work after them ... Steel is quoted at 175 percent in New York and Berlin.)
(My translation)

The second half of the poem describes the production of cotton, which is related to steel as bandages are related to weapons of war. The poem presents a stark commentary on international industrial-capitalist preparations for warfare in a time of international crisis. In 1938, Jacobsen celebrated May Day at a worker’s parade by reciting Øverland’s poem “Guernica,” an anti-Francoist text about the Spanish Civil War. The same year, after Hitler’s annexation of Austria, he published a protest poem against the German war machine, called “Fredens Festning” (“Fortress of Peace”) (Røsbak 135).

These examples show that Jacobsen was positioned on the pacifist, anti-capitalist left well into the late thirties. How could he have performed such a drastic political about-face? (One of his former friends called it “a political turnaround the likes of which I have never seen” (Lillebo 191).) Both biographers explain the change by pointing out aspects of his socialist anti-capitalism that Jacobsen apparently hoped to preserve in his National Socialism: his concern for worker’s interests and his hatred of imperialist England.¹¹⁰ The importance of the latter should not be underestimated: Jacobsen claimed that his decision was against England at least as much as it was for Germany (Røsbak 170). A turning point may have been when the Norwegian Labor Party (*Arbeiderpartiet*) formed an alliance with Great Britain in 1940, which sorely disappointed Jacobsen. Perhaps unexpectedly, it was to some extent common in Norway for leftists to join Quisling’s party during the occupation, in the belief that there was a true ‘socialism’ to be found

¹¹⁰ Røsbak writes that “drivkraften bak RJ’s insats for NS er hele tiden hans tro på sosialismen i nasjonalsosialismen” and that he was attracted to “tankegangen til venstrefløyen i NS” (228, 246).

within National Socialism (223).¹¹¹ While important to consider, the view of Jacobsen's fascism as an extension of his earlier socialism fails to capture something crucial: the quasi-religious and anti-nihilistic dimension of his political commitments. This poet expected radical anti-bourgeois politics to address not only social injustice, but also the existential predicament of modern technological culture that he explored in his interwar poetry. As we will see, his wartime writings contain an undeniably affective and messianic dimension; he was anticipating a source of redemption.

In January 1941, Jacobsen took over as the editor of *Kongsvinger Arbeiderbladet* – later renamed *Glåmdalen* – which received instructions from the *Deutsche Pressabteilung* specifying everything from layout to content (Lillebo 192). After the war, Jacobsen claimed that he tried to direct the paper as a local news source and to keep it from becoming a pure organ of Nazi ideology (Røsbak 194). He also argued that the editorials he signed did not reflect his own personal opinions, because they were sent from the German authorities. However, Røsbak has compared the published articles with the ones sent by the Nazis, and he concludes that Jacobsen added significant content and that the final design was his own (225). For instance, a lyrical voice emerges in some of them, such as “Vissent Lauv”: here, the titular “withered leaves” being blown away by the wind symbolize the ‘old’ political and social illusions – liberalism, democracy, and other ‘bourgeois’ relics – giving way to the “new growth” (“nytt lauvspring”) to come (*Kongsvinger Arbeiderbladet* 19 Feb. 1941). It is an organic image of fascist regeneration. Other articles contain a more aggressive and militant style that Røsbak views as the language of the official German press directions (196).

The editorials formed the basis for Jacobsen's sentence for treason of over three years forced labor after the war, when the court found him personally responsible for their published form (Røsbak 279).¹¹² These articles must be treated with caution, as they are not necessarily Jacobsen's original work, yet they do sometimes provide a glimpse of his priorities and convictions. One of them describes an ideological battle between young nations, which were free from the “iron grip of capitalism,” and older nations, namely Great Britain, which was the center of imperialist capitalism (“Kjensgjerninger,” *Kongsvinger Arbeiderbladet* 26 Feb. 1941). Others are more damning in terms of their ugly anti-Semitism: “The Cause of the War” from October 1942 describes a struggle between capital and labor, depicting Hitler as a fighter for social justice against “de tyske finansjøder, men også deres brødre i alle land” (“the German finance-Jews, but also their brothers in all countries”) (“Krigens årsak,” *Kongsvinger Arbeiderbladet* 24 Oct. 1942). An article from 1944 mocks the democratic press for being “kjøpt og betalt ... til å vedlikeholde den jødeimperialistiske hydras hypnose overfor de små folk” (“bought and paid ... to maintain the hypnosis in which the Jewish-imperialistic hydra holds the common man”) (Røsbak 227). In “The Barbarian Storm,” which was written in response to the Allied bombing of a monastery in Italy, ‘Jacobsen’ writes that the barbaric American capitalists have no appreciation of European civilization. The term ‘culture,’ has “en ganske annen betydning her i Europa enn i Amerika, og dens helligdomer lar seg ikke bygge opp igjen på 14 dager slik som filmkulissene i Hollywood” (“quite a different

¹¹¹ See Tore Pryser, *Arbeiderbevegelsen og Nasjonal Samling – om venstrestrømninger i Quislings parti* and Øystein Sørensen, *Fra Marx til Quisling* (Røsbak 440n).

¹¹² Jacobsen remained active as the editor and propaganda leader in his district until the very end (Røsbak 247-248). The sentence for treason is also explained in *Ord må en omvei* (212-213).

meaning here in Europe than in America, and its sacred places are not easily built up again in fourteen days like a Hollywood film set”) (Røsbak 226). The article goes on to state that there is no difference between primitive America and the “robot state in the east” – in fact, “kulturnegrene i vest og kulturnegrene i øst i virkeligheten er en og samme fiende, nemlig den kapitalistiske barbar” (“the cultural negroes in the west and the cultural negroes in the east are one and the same enemy, namely capitalist barbarism”), and they share the same “sadistisk ødeleggelseslyst” (“sadistic lust for destruction”) (226). From today’s perspective, the racism and anti-Semitism of these statements are some of the most offensive things contained in the articles that Jacobsen published and signed. Regardless of any discrepancies in perspective or style, it remains the case that Jacobsen was legally and morally responsible for these articles, even though his newspaper was controlled by the occupying Nazi authorities.

The fact that Jacobsen was able to shift his vision of ‘socialism’ to the *Nasjonal Samling* party should prompt us to ask what he was looking for in political radicalism in the first place. In 1946, Jacobsen wrote in his diary that “alle politiske massebevegelser er i virkeligheten miniatyr-avbildninger av den store Kirke, og surrogater for den kristne tro” (“all political mass movements are in reality miniature-depictions of the great Church, and surrogates for Christian faith”) (Tendø Jacobsen 107). Both Jacobsen’s political engagements, with the *Mot Dag* left and with *Nasjonal Samling*, later appeared to him as phases on the way back to the Christian God (Lillebo 227). He wrote to his wife in 1946 that “det tiden lengter etter – og som skapte *nasjonalsosialismen* blant annet – er en fast tro, en *stor* livstanke og en trygg lærebygning som menneskene kan lene sitt hode til. Det er i dag etter min mening bare to ting å velge mellom: Katolisismen eller Kommunismen. Det andre er ferdig” (“what the age is longing for – and what led to *National Socialism* among other things – is a firm belief, a *great* view of life, and a secure doctrine that people can rest their heads on. In my view there are only two things to choose between today: Catholicism and Communism. The second one is over”) (Røsbak 290). In another postwar reflection, Jacobsen wrote that people are longing for “en befrielse fra noe ondt man ikke selv vet” (“a liberation from something evil they don’t even know about”) and they are stuck in a situation of divine lack: “verdens krise skyldes at Gud er borte” (“the world is in crisis because God is absent”) (Lillebo 227). He imagined a violent storm that was about to consume the nihilistic, disintegrating world: “En etsend vind blåser over verden og varsler Ragnarokk [sic] ... Vindene, de skarpe og fortærende som jager over jorden, foran Dommedag” (“A corrosive wind is blowing through the world, and omen of Ragnarok ... The winds, the severe and destructive ones that hunt the earth, before Judgment Day”) (227). Such remarks shed light on the apocalyptic mentality in which Jacobsen greeted the redeeming power of National Socialism. One of his comments even refers to Nazism as “det første utslag av denne messiasforventning. Dens mystiske kjennemerker var et surrogat, en erstatning for det drepte mysterium, for den døde Gud, etter kirkens og Gudssamfundets ødeleggelse” (“the first product of this expectation of a messiah. Its mystical signs were a surrogate, a replacement for the demolished mystery, for the dead God, after the destruction of the church and religious society”) (Røsbak 290).

Years later, in a 1984 interview, Jacobsen was still explaining mass politics in terms of salvation: “Både kommunismen og fascismen er verdslige religioner, med klare paralleler til jesuittismen. De har syndere og frelste, himmel og helvete” (“Both

communism and fascism are worldly religions, with clear parallels to jesuitism. They have sinners and saved, heaven and hell”) (*Frøkonom*, 16). Twentieth-century totalitarianisms have often been interpreted as political religions, or at least as political ideologies that expressed themselves in religious terms of belief, sacrifice, and redemption in order to address the anomie of contemporary society (Griffin, *Fascism* 5). The Italian historian of fascism Emilio Gentile is perhaps the most influential writer on the subject of totalitarianism as the sacralization of politics (Griffin/Feldman 39-70). According to Gentile, many early analyses of fascism and Nazism emphasized the messianic, ritualistic, and metaphysical dimensions of the politics (59). As Adorno observes in *The Jargon of Authenticity*, fascism cloaked itself in quasi-theological language, and in this manner “a smoldering evil expresses itself as though it were salvation” (5).

Retrospectively, then, Jacobsen explained his fascist commitment as a longing for salvation from the contemporary malaise. In some of his wartime editorials, Jacobsen fantasized an apocalyptic scenario of destruction and regeneration – ‘storm’ followed by ‘spring.’ One of them explains the current world crisis and its coming solution with reference to the final battle of the Norse gods, saying that “after Ragnarok a social state will be built up” in which the interests and security of the workers would be assured (“Etter krigen,” *Kongsvinger Arbeiderbladet* 16 April 1941). Belief in a better world after Ragnarok also appears in “Discipline,” one of the articles that Røsbak claims was crafted personally by Jacobsen. This text describes the era in which Jacobsen’s generation grew up as “den uroligste av alle tidsepoker, tiden foran og mellom de store kriger – da alt vaklet, alt var spenning, tvil, svakhet, angst for morgendagen” (“the most troubled of all historical epochs, the period before and between the great wars – when everything was about to collapse, everything was tension, doubt, weakness, anxious waiting for the morning”) (Røsbak 226). Here we see the tense and anticipatory tenor of Jacobsen’s political discourse: the present epoch is a time of disintegration, confusion, and ambivalence before daybreak.

In some little-known wartime poetry, Jacobsen also expressed excitement about participating in the dawn of a new age. While there may be uncertainty about the authorship of Jacobsen’s editorials, in the case of the ones about ‘Ragnarok’ we may safely consider the perspective his own, because they match the rhetoric and imagery of the poetry he published in the same newspaper during the war. Jacobsen’s National Socialism may have been temporary, “moderate,” and based on socialist and anti-English principles, but these poems also express his messianic expectation of a heroically and violently transformed world.

The first poem Jacobsen published during the war, “Tideverv” (“The Age”) appeared in the Christmas issue of *Glåmdalen* in 1943. The poem expresses hope for the rebirth of a new world after the storm of war. Printed in Gothic script, its language of collective struggle, daybreak, and rebirth is as close to fascist kitsch as Jacobsen’s writing comes.

Snart skal det stige bak skodden
nyfødt en jord påny,
demrende fram av vår lagnads unge,
veldige morgengry.

Snart skal dens lunder grønnske
i lys av en nyfødt dag
og løvkroner suse i tidevervets
hastende vingeslag.

Snart skal hver arm få løfte,
snart skal hver hug i tru
fylkes om dåd og tanker
du ikke aner nu

...

Av sorg er søyler støpte
under de nye velv,
hvor du i høgtids-haller
atter kan finne deg selv.

Kom storm, kom snø, kom vårlys,
kom sommer med solskinnsfokk.
Vi veit at en verden grønnes
bak røken fra Ragnarok.
(*Glåmdalen* 12.25.1943; Lillebo 196-197)

(Soon it will rise up from behind the mist / a new earth born again, / shimmering forth in the young and mighty / dawn of our destiny. // Soon its groves will turn green / in the light of a newborn day / and treetops rustle in the quickening / wingbeats of the new age. // Soon each arm will be raised / soon each faithful heart will / rally for deeds and thoughts / you do not imagine now ... Columns are cast of sorrow / under the new arches, / where in halls of celebration / you can find yourself again. // Come storm, come snow, come spring light, come summer with sunshine. / We know that a world is blooming / behind the smoke from Ragnarok.) (My translation)

Whereas the newspaper editorials might reasonably be seen as the work of a forced hand, no one told Jacobsen to write a poem exemplifying fascist palingenesis. This poem anticipates a fated victory after the present hardships, a spring in which people will “return to themselves” and build the world anew in social harmony. Thematically, this text obviously refers to the Poetic Edda, especially to its first poem “Völuspá” (The Prophecy of the Seeress). The diction here is rather different from Jacobsen’s ordinary *bokmål*, perhaps because he is borrowing from the rhetoric of the Norwegian fascist party, with words like “fylke” (assemble for battle, rally) and “lagnad” (fate, destiny) (Lillebo 197). “Tideverv” reveals Jacobsen’s appallingly genuine hope that National Socialism would achieve a new dispensation after the grand struggle currently being waged, similar to the reconstruction of the world after Ragnarok in Norse mythology.

The Christmas issue in 1944 also featured a new poem by Jacobsen, “Ring Klokke” (“Ring Bells”). This poem does not contain the same mythological imagery, but

it continues to express hope for a new dawn, even though it was written at a time when the Third Reich was nearing defeat.

Ring klokke bak snøen.
Gjennom dens hvite flor
hører vi milevide
ditt bronseord.

Ring klokke i skogen
høgt over granens sus.
Ring for riker som kommer
og riker som går i grus.

Ring klokke bak natten.
Ring sorg. Ring lyst.
Ring for de ville drømmer
i mannens bryst.

Ring klokke i stormen.
Ton ut i nettenes hav.
Ring for de blåsende blomster
over en vissen grav.

Ring klokke bak døden
den sang vet jeg.
Løft dine bronselurer
mot evighet.

Ring klokke i hjertene
– stilt så det bærer frem.
Bryt ut som fugleskarer
på langferd hjem.

Ring alle verdens klokker
med rungende, sterke slag.
Ring med tusende tunger
mot dag, Mot Dag.
(Røsbak 242-243)

(Ring bells behind the snow. / Through its white layer / we hear from miles away / your word of bronze. // Ring bells in the forest / high over the sougning spruce. / Ring for empires to come / and empires falling to ruin. // Ring bells behind the night. / Ring sorrow. Ring delight. / Ring for the wild dreams / in the breast of man. // Ring bells in the storm. / Sound out in the sea of nights. / Ring for the blossoms blowing / over a faded grave. // Ring bells behind death / I know that song. / Raise your bronze horns / to eternity. // Ring bells in our hearts / – calmly

so it carries forth / Burst out like flocks of birds / on a journey home. // Ring all the world's bells / in resounding, strong strokes. / Ring with a thousand tongues / toward day, Toward Day.) (My translation)

Here, the theme of an idealized new age is crucial again, but the tone is more elegiac and mild. The poem is not easy to decode in terms of its historical significance. Has Jacobsen given up on National Socialism at this point? Is the Third Reich one of the “riker som kommer” or one of the “riker som går i grus”? The plaintive tone suggests that Jacobsen has by this point become disillusioned about the redemptive potential or even the continued existence of National Socialism. Nevertheless, Jacobsen celebrates political idealism: mankind's utopian desires (“ville drømmer i mannens bryst”) for liberation (“bryt ut som fugleskarer”) and homeland (“på langferd hjem”).

The poem concludes strangely, with the capitalized words “Mot Dag,” the name of the Communist periodical and organization Jacobsen was involved with in the thirties. Røsbak asks whether this might be an instance of concealed propaganda for Jacobsen's earlier leftist stance, but I don't find that very plausible. In my view, the repetition of “mot dag, Mot dag” unites Jacobsen's political radicalism of the left and the right under the banner of a generalized quasi-religious utopian longing. As we have seen, this reading accords better with Jacobsen's own retrospective view of his commitments. Jacobsen's Nazism has been seen as ideologically “moderate,” in that he was not a fanatical anti-Semite and belonged more to the so-called ‘socialist’ wing of *Nasjonal Samling*. However, these poetic texts show that his political faith in the radically new dawn was quite immoderate; it was a utopian commitment of the most disgraceful sort. It was not, as in Slavoj Žižek's take on Heidegger's Nazism, “the right step in the wrong direction” (*In Defense of Lost Causes*). It was a fatefully wrong step in the direction of the right.

Secular modernity, according to Matei Calinescu, does not suppress religious longing, but rather diverts it from traditional locations into new forms. Secularization may even have intensified the religious imagination in heterodox forms ranging from art and aesthetics to non-conventional religious practices to utopian politics. Calinescu observes that after the cultural decline of Christianity comes “the powerful emergence of utopianism, perhaps the single most important event in the modern intellectual history of the West ... Indeed the rage for utopia ... pervades the whole intellectual spectrum of modernity from political philosophy to poetry and the arts” (63). In the case of Jacobsen, this pattern is unmistakable. Those who view the National Socialist intermission in Jacobsen's career as an opportunistic or naïve lapse of judgment fail to notice that his political commitment was a utopian form of redirected religious imagination.

As quoted above, Jacobsen wrote in hindsight that his age craved a new ethos – what he called “a firm belief, a *great* view of life, and a secure doctrine that people can rest their heads on” (Røsbak 290). The poet's postwar postmortem of his fascism is saturated with what Gianni Vattimo calls ‘incomplete’ nihilism – the desire for another ultimate ground of authority and paternal wisdom after the “death of God.” Nietzsche's famous announcement of the “death of God” can be summarized as “the devaluation of the highest values,” or in other words as the depletion of dominant metaphysical and moral ideas. In his 1887 notes on “European Nihilism,” Nietzsche writes, “one interpretation has collapsed; but because it was considered *the* interpretation it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain” (*The*

Nietzsche Reader 386). The resulting nihilism has two forms: Nietzsche distinguishes between a ‘passive’ or ‘reactive’ nihilism that mourns meaning and an ‘active’ or ‘accomplished’ nihilism that affirms existence even in the absence of a foundational interpretation.

Vattimo builds on this distinction between incomplete and ‘accomplished’ versions of nihilism in works such as *The End of Modernity* and the more recent *Nihilism and Emancipation*. Accomplished nihilism for Vattimo is the post-metaphysical thinking of hermeneutics; he welcomes “the letting-go of foundationalism and the letting-loose of a conflict of interpretations” as a style of thought more congruent with a democratic, anti-authoritarian politics (*Nihilism and Emancipation* 92). Incomplete nihilism, on the other hand, refuses to admit the absence of a metaphysical foundation of meaning. In Jacobsen’s case, incomplete nihilism is all-too-ready for a medicinal commitment to a new savior, a utopian remedy against modern estrangement. Fascism spoke to this metaphysical urge to replace the deceased interpretation – Christianity – with a new ultimacy, rather than what Vattimo would consider a healthy “letting go” of absolutes.

Jacobsen’s anti-nihilism typifies the nostalgic refusal of desacralization characteristic of a large segment of modernist culture. Vattimo, on the other hand, embodies a postmodern espousal of nihilism “as our only chance” (*End of Modernity* 23). For thinkers like Vattimo and Richard Rorty, nihilism is no longer a privative condition to be remedied, but rather a lasting condition that may even be emancipatory. Hermeneutics as the thought of accomplished nihilism endeavors, in Vattimo’s words,

to reconstruct rationality in the wake of the death of God and opposes any current of negative nihilism, in other words the desperation of those who continue to cultivate a sense of mourning because “religion is no more.” ... The tragic pose is often a prelude to a ‘leap of faith’ (a surrender to the dogmatic authoritarianism of churches, central committees, charismatic leaders). (*Nihilism and Emancipation* xxvi -xxvii).

Perhaps the best medicine against nihilism is not a surrogate form of salvation, something else in the highest position, but rather *more nihilism*, an anti-nostalgic acceptance that authentic foundations have been discontinued. This mellower, more ironic form of nihilism is in Vattimo’s thought even compatible with a ‘weakened’ or ‘nonreligious’ conception of Christian belief. Jacobsen, however, did not move in such an anti-foundationalist direction; he converted to Catholicism.

Postwar: After the Great Symphonies

On May 9, 1945, the day after Nazi Germany’s unconditional surrender, Jacobsen was arrested in the town of Kongsvinger. For several days he was imprisoned with other traitors, including volunteers from the Eastern Front (Lillebo 204).¹¹³ At his hearing a month later, Jacobsen claimed that he joined *Nasjonal Samling* because he approved of “the social aspect” of the party’s program (205). He was not sentenced for treason until the following summer, when the court drew attention to his activity as the newspaper

¹¹³ Scandinavian volunteers in the German army joined groups such as the SS Panzer Division *Wiking*, which fought on the Eastern Front. Incidentally, Hamsun published an article in 1941 encouraging young Norwegian men to volunteer in the SS – as his younger son Arild did (Kolloen 255).

editor; they listed eleven incriminating editorials (focusing, of course, on what counted as grounds for treason, not on all expressions of ideological commitment) (212-213). Although critics continue to treat this poet's fascist collaboration as a unfortunate digression from a normal course to which he simply returned, the effects and consequences of this experience were in fact quite transformative for his life and his poetry. In the five years immediately after the war, Jacobsen served his hard labor sentence and underwent an existential crisis that led him back to Christianity. He had witnessed the collapse of political solutions to liberal modernity's spiritual and social chaos, and in his guilt and disillusionment, he decided to return to the church. Following the Decadents of the 1890s, he converted to Roman Catholicism, a somewhat exotic faith in Norway's Lutheran context. Thus, after Jacobsen's metaphysical longings were diverted through a catastrophic episode of sacralized politics, they found more permanent habitation in a conventional religious discourse.

In the forties and fifties, there was actually an increase in the number of Catholics in Europe. As Tony Judt observes, the Catholic Church offered continuity and reassurance in a violently transformed world: its "association with the old order, indeed its firm stand against modernity and change ... gave it a special appeal in these transitional years" (*Postwar* 229). Protestant churches could not exert a similar allure, suggests Judt, because they "did not offer an alternative to the modern world but rather a way to live in harmony with it" (229). Although Jacobsen's Catholicism is not regularly detectable in his later poetry, in *Hemmelig liv* (*Secret Life*, 1954) he published a remarkable poem about Norway's medieval wooden churches (which date from the time when the Church in Norway was still Roman Catholic): "Stavkirker" ("Stave Churches").

Jeg tror på de mørke kirkene,
 de som ennu står som tjærebål i skogene
 og bærer duft med sig som de dyprøde rosene
 fra tider som kanskje eide mer kjærlighet.
 De sotsvarte tårnene tror jeg på, de som lukter av solbrannen
 og gammel røkelse brent inn av seklene.

Laudate pueri Dominum, laudate nomen Domini.

Øksene teljet dem til og sølvklokker klang i dem.
 Noen skar drømmer inn og ga dem vinger å vandre med
 ut gjennom tider og fjell. De velter som brottsjø omkring dem.
 Nu er de skip, med utkikkstønnen vendt mot Ostindia,
 Santa Maria, Pinta og Niña da dagene mørknet
 mot verdens ende, årelangt fra Andalusia.

Laudate pueri Dominum, laudate nomen Domini.

Angst overalt, selv Columbus er redd nu
 der hildringer lokker dem frem og vinden har slangetunger.
 Stjernene stirrer urørlige ned med avsindige jernøyne,
 alle dager er onde, det er ingen redning mer, men vi
 seiler, seiler, seiler.

Laudate pueri Dominum, laudate nomen Domini.

(I believe in the dark churches, / the ones that still stand like tarred pyres in the woods / and like deep red roses carry a fragrance / from times that perhaps had more love. / Those jet-black towers I believe in: the ones that smell of the sun's heat / and old incense burnt in by the centuries. / *Laudate pueri Dominum, laudate nomen Domini.* // Axes shaped them and silver bells rang in them. / Someone carved dreams in and gave them wings so they'd wander / out across ages and mountains – which surge up around them like breakers. / Now they are ships, with crow's nest turned toward East India, / the Santa Maria, Pinta and Niña when the days grew dark / near the end of the world, years out from Andalucía. / *Laudate ...* // Everywhere dread, now fear takes even Columbus / as mirages lure them on and the wind has the tongues of a serpent. / The stars stare down impassively with demented eyes of iron, / every day is evil, there's no hope of being saved, but we / keep sailing, sailing, sailing. *Laudate ...*) (North 92-93)

This is a good example of Jacobsen's Catholic anti-modernity; the poem sets up a clear contrast between a morally superior past and an evil, unredeemed present. At the beginning, the speaker expresses a preference for "the dark churches," as opposed, presumably, to the 'light' churches of modern Lutheran Norway. These stave churches, though "black with soot" (*sotsvarte*), are alluring to the senses (redolent of roses and incense), and they suggest a less hate-filled historical period ("mer kjærlighet"). The poem imagines their enduring oldness as a heartening message transmitted through the ages. But, in the middle of the second stanza, these emblems of the Old World transform into vessels on the way to a New World; they become Columbus' ships traveling to the Americas. As opposed to the poem's past moment – the time of love when dreams were carved – the present is a time of drift, dread, and depravity. The days have grown dark and the end of the world is approaching, while "mirages" tempt the vessels off course, and they are carried only by an evil wind. "Even Columbus" has succumbed to the present's nihilistic lack of direction and orientation, while the stars that should provide navigational guidance are of no help, with their "demented eyes of iron." In this world "there is no more salvation" (another way to translate "det er ingen redning mer"), just movement: "sailing, sailing, sailing." The repeated Latin lines from The Book of Psalms suggest that the only guidance to be found is in 'old' religion: "praise, servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord."

Around the time of his conversion to Catholicism, Jacobsen wrote to his wife and, in a way we have seen was typical, explained his radical political commitments in terms of a spiritual search for therapy and solace.

Jeg har søkt og søkt – i arbeiderbevegelsen, i det som kom etterpå ... Jeg har lett etter en sikker grunn å bygge på [...] noe å hengi seg til [...] mon ikke all denne travelheten min i de siste ti årene var et slags bedøvelsesmiddel. [...] Jeg kastet mig inn i organisasjonsarbeide og allskens elendighet. For å døyve uroen og for å vinne en vei fram – i denne forvirringens tid. (Røsbak 297)

(I have searched and searched – in the labor movement, in what came after that ... I have looked for a firm ground to build on ... something to devote myself to ... I

wonder if all my activity in the past decade was not really a sort of anesthetic. ... I have thrown myself into organizational work and all sorts of wretchedness. To deaden my feeling of anxiety and to find a way forward – in this age of confusion.)

Jacobsen interprets his Nazi sympathies – euphemized as “what came after that” and “all sorts of wretchedness” – as an anesthetic to soothe *his* anxiety, *his* pain. By portraying himself as the sufferer of a confused age, Jacobsen sidesteps his actual ideological commitment and his culpability. This inaugurates a disappointing pattern of avoidance that the poet continued for the rest of his life.

In his poetry of the fifties and up until his death in 1994, Jacobsen extends his earlier critique of unrestrained technological development and Anglo-American liberal capitalism, while he also develops a more explicit environmentalist message. A central aspect of Jacobsen’s earnest critique of consumerist culture is his notion that material wealth and technological comforts have a dark side: “Vi har mistet noe ... Vi er kommet inn i enn tingverden og en kjøpeverden, som vi aldri har drømt om ... Maskinene hjelper oss ikke med alt” (“we have lost something ... we have entered a world of things and world of purchases, which we never imagined ... The machines can’t help us with everything”) (*Frøkorn* 17). He spoke out against television as an instrument of Americanization; against the modern *reklamesivilisasjon* (culture of advertising), which he said produced empty, indifferent, atomized individuals who would follow any political leader, but had no sense of solidarity or family (18-19). It is indeed ironic to see this particular poet faulting individuals in liberal postwar societies for being willing to follow any political leader because they feel spiritually empty.

In his later poetry and in interviews, Jacobsen offers a lot of general criticism of ‘the age,’ but no real recognition or condemnation of his own specific actions; he is vocal and preachy about the nihilistic culture of (post)modernity, but he is utterly silent about the victims of the regime he supported. Jacobsen’s commitment to Nazism was desperate and disastrous, but – as with the much younger Gunter Grass – an additionally frustrating thing was how he dealt with his wartime past: he lied about it. He refused to acknowledge it or come clean in any way, even as he accepted the role of a moralizing and politically clear-sighted public figure. The novelist Knut Faldbakken interviewed Jacobsen in 1975 and heard only denials of his involvement with *Nasjonal Samling*. (Faldbakken later quipped that the poet’s strategy was captured in the title of his 1965 collection *Stillheten etterpå* – “The Silence Afterwards.”)¹¹⁴ Jacobsen’s mendacious evasion of his wartime past was so thorough that his son published a book in 2007 called *Kjente jeg deg?* (“Did I know you?” – the title of a poem Jacobsen wrote after his beloved wife died in the early eighties). Whatever one thinks about the environmentalist cultural critique or the beauty of his postwar poetry, Jacobsen clearly does not provide a very good model of what the Germans call *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (the struggle to come to terms with a difficult past).

Yet, much of the critical commentary on this poet refuses to countenance his fascism as a serious issue – thereby repeating his own evasiveness. Jacobsen is often regarded as a purveyor of simple wisdom, openness, and wonder. His Canadian

¹¹⁴ See Korsvold, “Rolf Jacobsen: Løy om NS-fortid for alle.”

translator, Roger Greenwald, describes him with hushed reverence as contemplative and religious in sensibility, combining “an ancient way of looking ... with an openness to the new,” and writing in a way that “evinces humility at every turn” (*North* xvi–xvii). When Greenwald writes that “silence lies at the core of [his] work in more senses than one,” he certainly does not intend to refer to Jacobsen’s avoidance of his fascist past, but perhaps this remark inadvertently indicates something important.

I view Jacobsen’s silence, understandable though it may be, as a moral failure. But the point of investigating Jacobsen’s National Socialism is not to demonize him personally or to unveil his literature as ‘fascist.’ It is, again, to understand how certain types of literary modernist responses to the situation of modernity end up complicit with regimes that seemed to offer utopian visions of renewal and solutions to the culture of nihilism. In this respect, Jacobsen’s poetic encounter with modernity and nihilism should be seen as prelude to his fascist utopianism. Jacobsen’s fascist hiatus was indeed connected to his poetic production before and after the war, not in terms of ideological content, but as part of his casting about in various places for a foundation of meaning to counteract the condition of nihilism.

The aspects of National Socialism that appealed to Jacobsen – its ‘social’ component, its promise of a balance of nature and technology – migrate into his stance after the war, but they are divorced from any utopian hope of redemption. Jacobsen’s passion for political salvation gives way to the pessimistic-green stance of *Hemmelig Liv* – sometimes called his ‘second debut,’ but also the conclusion to the phase of his authorship that began with *Jord og Jern*. Despite his personal conversion to Catholicism, his postwar poems continue to thematize the disintegration of grand narratives and the resulting cultural situation of lack, fragmented meaning, and nihilistic drift (as in “Stave Churches”). *Hemmelig liv* contains several definitive Jacobsen poems, including “Landskap med gravemaskiner,” “Tømmer,” and “Mørk Saga,” a prophetic-dystopian poem about ‘the age of oil.’ By way of conclusion, I would like to spotlight “De store symfoniers tid” (“The Age of Great Symphonies”) a poem that expresses Jacobsen’s continued preoccupation with the culture of nihilism, even after his disappointment with political solutions.

De store symfoniers tid
er over nu.

De steg mot himlen i stor prakt
som solskimrende skyer med torden i
over de store århundrer.
Cumulis under lyshimler. Corialan.

Nu stømmer de ned igjen som regn,
et stengrått, stripet regn over alle bølgelengder og programmer
og dekker jorden som en våt frakk, en sekk av lyd.

Nu faller de ned igjen som regn,
de pisker mot skyskraperne som elektrisk hagl
og drypper ned i bondens kammers

og trommer over villabyene or murstenshavet
som evindeligt lyd.

Regn som lyd.
Seid umschlungen Millionen,
til å døve skrik

alle dager, alle dager
over jorden som er tørst og tar dem til sig igjen.

(The age of the great symphonies / is over now. // They rose toward the heavens
in full splendor / like thunderclouds shimmering in the sun / over the great
centuries. / Cumulus under clear skies. Coriolanus. // Now they're pouring back
down as rain, / a stone-gray, streaked rain on all wavelengths and programs, /
covering the earth like a wet coat, a sack of sound. // Now they're falling back
down from the heavens, / they pelt the skyscrapers like electric hail / and seep
down into the farmer's bedroom / and drum on the suburbs and the oceans of
brick / as continuous sound. // Rain as sound. / Seid umschlungen Millionen, / to
deaden screams // every day, every day / on this earth that is thirsty and drinks
them in again.) (*North* 68-69)

In this poem, the symphonies of centuries pour back down from the sky as a nourishing rain. Perhaps like Jacobsen's healing Catholicism, they act as a musical narcotic that can "deaden the screams" of those living among "oceans of brick," in the wasteland.

Conclusion

Specters of Nihilism, Catastrophes of Redemption

In the 1967 essay “The Idea of the Modern,” the great democratic-socialist critic Irving Howe identified the “specter of nihilism” as “the central preoccupation, the inner demon, at the heart of modern literature” (36-37). Howe meant the term nihilism both morally and existentially; he referred to the experience of losing belief in both “transcendent imperatives and secular values” as sources of moral orientation, and also to the feeling that existence has become meaningless. In the modern culture of nihilism – the condition of devaluation proclaimed by Nietzsche with the “death of God” – experience is reduced to a wasteland of boredom and drift. At its base, Howe claimed, “nihilism comes to imply a loss of connection with the sources of life” (38). The Norwegian writers examined in this study demonstrate this broadly modernist encounter with the specter of nihilism. They perceived the condition of nihilism as a derailment of ‘life’ under the rationalized and mechanized conditions of a recently formed industrial capitalist culture. Moreover, they understood the Anglo-American world as the source and primary location of this culture of nihilism; this motivated their geopolitical affiliations during the thirties and forties. As figures from a peripheral nation with a strong liberal-democratic consensus, they were part of a minority of fascist sympathizers who collaborated with the more powerful German center. In Nazi Germany they detected a force heroically opposed to the liberal-bourgeois culture of nihilism, rationalism, and materialism.

The careers of Hamsun, Sveen, and Jacobsen all entail a transition from an aesthetic form of anti-rationalism or anti-nihilism to political form of renewal, a shift from a modernist encounter with modernity’s scene of chaos and reduction to a fantasy of existential and social redemption via fascism. In each case, as I have argued, the intellectual orientation that motivates their turn to fascist utopianism also lies behind their aesthetically modernist urge to create new anti-bourgeois and anti-realist forms of artistic expression and representation. This orientation includes, as we have seen in the differing cases, a neo-romantic and ‘reactionary-radical’ dissent from the social, often urban, world of liberal modernity; an ideological and affective opposition to the culture, ethos, and style of secular rationality; the self-perception that one belongs to an aesthetic, sexual, or spiritual vanguard; and the construal of the present as a time of disintegration and degeneracy that requires a totalistic solution to build a glorified future.

Each author imagined fascism as a vehicle for the secular redemption of European modernity. Unwilling to live tentatively in an open-ended present, in the manner of Musil and other more ironic-analytic modernists, Hamsun, Sveen, and Jacobsen attached themselves to an absolute and sinister solution that spoke to their utopian desire for revitalization and ‘idealistic’ overcoming. Fascism offered a new form of salvation in the absence or exhaustion of conventional mythic frameworks. In my analysis, their varied modernist aesthetic practices and their desire for fascist cultural revolution were both part of a search for reenchantment and revitalization.

Whether the target was ‘positivism’ (for the early Hamsun), ‘materialism and banalization’ (for Sveen) or ‘nihilism’ (for Jacobsen), in each instance the pattern of response was similar. The case of Hamsun displays in a single authorship the more broad historical development from a fin-de-siècle moment of reactionary-radical rebellion to an

interwar moment of utopian faith in the Germanic overcoming of Anglo-American materialism. As I have argued here by examining Hamsun's novelistic carnivalization of realism and positivism in *Mysterier*, his early modernist fiction is quite revealing for his later fascist politics, even if the former does not foreshadow the latter teleologically. Hamsun formed an image of the Anglo-American as the destroyer of "life" early in his career; this mental construction of the ideological adversary stuck with him to the bitter end of his hero-worshipping advocacy of interwar fascist leaders and regimes.

The case of Hamsun's much younger admirer, the sexually and politically dissident Åsmund Sveen, also shows the importance of vitalistic discourse in Norwegian modernist politics. Sveen's intrepid homoerotic vitalism overlapped with the cultural-critical foundation of his fascist allegiance. As with Hamsun, Sveen saw European politics in the interwar period as a battle between 'life,' ancient wisdom, and national or ethnic spiritual-cultural strength (fascism) and stultifying rationalism, restrictive bourgeois morality, and deracinated weakness (liberalism). (Soviet Communism was also perceived as a rationalizing, mechanizing threat to the eternal forces of life in this scheme.) Sveen fabricated his own unconventional religious framework, with Eros as the central term, and he imagined fascism as the world-historical movement of a post-materialist revitalization.

The case of Jacobsen shows the most explicit instance of totalitarian politics as a form of secular redemption, with a clear basis in religious sentiment in search of a suitable channel. Less concerned with aesthetic and cultural vitalism than Hamsun or Sveen, and more explicitly disturbed by the prospect of technological modernity as a form of nihilistic destruction, Jacobsen latched onto fascism both as a way to assuage unresolved personal-existential anxieties and as a way to fasten modern culture to a secure foundation.

As some historians have argued, fascism should be seen as a distinct 'metapolitical phenomenon' that goes beyond ordinary party allegiances or typical categorical divisions of political thought (Payne 459). To the extent that these authors imagined it not only as a source of public social and economic renewal, but also as a form of inner transformation and even transcendence, fascism indeed went 'beyond politics' to embrace very broad cultural and spiritual concerns. In Griffin's important interpretation, which I have favored in my analysis of these cases, fascism's mythic palingenetic force derives from the widespread perception of degeneration and loss of sacred meaning that was the existential accompaniment to modernization, rationalization, and secularization in Europe.

As revealing as it is, this 'existentialist' reading of the authors' search for redemption should not obscure the racial dimension of their fears of degeneration and decline. They sought 'redemption' not for humanity in general, but for Germanic or 'white' Europe. Their continental affiliation made them 'traitors' in the context of the Norwegian nation, but from an outside perspective this affiliation signifies their peripheral desire to join a strong, dominant center. The potent Germanic center of National Socialism was a redeeming, regenerating force that seemed to offer what they desired: a political form of idealism that would reinvigorate Europe and counteract the desiccating materialism of both Americanism and Bolshevism.

They thus imagined a particular ethnic community as the custodian of genuine 'life' and wisdom in opposition to the nihilism they saw in the uprooted conditions of

liberal modernity and in the Anglo-American world. Indeed, America for Hamsun, as for many others on the European right to this day, was contemptible not only for its rampant commercialism and un-historical shallowness, but also for its racial and ethnic mixing. For both Hamsun and Sveen, 'vitality' was inherently linked to a superior 'white' Europe that need to be protected or reasserted in the face of modernity's cosmopolitan and materialist tendencies. This racialized 'idealism' and ethnic particularism make their fascist visions of redemption crucially different from the widespread Marxist millenarianism of the thirties.

The sort of redemption that Hamsun, Sveen, and Jacobsen imagined to be embodied in European fascism turned out catastrophically – for their own postwar lives and compromised legacies, but more importantly for the millions of people they never knew who died in the Nazi genocide. Anti-Semitism did not appear frequently or unequivocally in their literary works, as it did in the case of Pound or Celine. However, it was an undeniable and clearly visible component of the regime they chose to support. Each author voiced distastefully racist or anti-Semitic comments at one point or another in a nonfictional context. Quite simply, to support Nazism was to think in terms of racial hygiene to some extent. But how did they react to or justify Nazi violence? The Holocaust is now recognized and memorialized as *the* central feature of World War Two. As Tony Judt writes, "the Holocaust today is much more than just another undeniable fact about a past that Europeans can no longer choose to ignore ... the recovered memory of Europe's dead Jews has become the very definition and guarantee of the continent's restored humanity" (*Postwar* 804). We should remember that these writers could not have experienced their support for National Socialism as support for 'Auschwitz' as we know it today. One inevitably wonders when and how they became aware that their anticipated golden age would require the elimination of Europe's Jews. Examining their literature as I have done can reveal some of the affective and intellectual patterns that lay behind their fascist sympathies, and probably the sympathies of many others in their historical moment. But to a large extent their response to Nazi violence remains in the dark, aided by their silence and their solipsism.

Are these merely further cases of the oft-noted irresponsibility of twentieth-century literary intellectuals in public life? Although it is uncontroversial to reject their politics today, I would avoid the comforting conclusion that these writers were simply irrational fools or malevolent racists whose ways of thinking and feeling in response to modernity can be excised from European and Norwegian cultural history. Except for Sveen, whose marginal sexual identity may have helped to hinder the kind of public rehabilitation that Jacobsen enjoyed, they are not minor figures. Indeed, Hamsun and Jacobsen are *completely central* to twentieth-century Norwegian literature. They were not the most philosophical astute writers, but despite this – or perhaps because of it – their work seems to have acted as a lightning rod for the widespread confusions and ambivalence felt by people in societies undergoing rapid modernization, or what some now think of as a first wave of globalization.

As Tony Judt writes in *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century*,

we may not be altogether comfortable acknowledging the number and quality of nationalist and Fascist intellectuals in [the interwar] years, but at least until 1941

the influence of writers like Ernst Jünger in Germany, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle and Louis-Ferdinand Celine in France, Mircea Eliade in Romania, or Henri de Man in Belgium was probably greater than that of their left-leaning contemporaries whom we more readily celebrate today: André Malraux, John Dewey, or even George Orwell. (15)

One could certainly add Hamsun to this list of influential figures. Judt goes on to observe, crucially, that “in dismissing the failed promises and false prophets of the past, we are also a little too quick to underestimate – or simply to forget – their appeal” (16). Though we reject the content and style of their ideological solutions, the crisis of modern civilization to which they responded remains with us in an even more globalized form. Discontent with liberal-democratic societies and capitalist cultures remains intense, while xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and ethnic particularism never seem to exit the historical stage. Our present globalized culture too lives with the specter of nihilism and perhaps will never outgrow the hunger for apocalyptic solutions that twisted these writers’ politics into catastrophes of redemption.

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