KEEPER OF THE PROTOCOLS:
THE WORKS OF JENS BJØRNEBOE
IN THE CROSCURRENTS
OF WESTERN LITERATURE

By

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ABSTRACT
Keeper of the Protocols argues that Jens Bjørneboe was a consciously European author, of international stature, whose works cannot be properly understood if treated simply as the product of a "Scandinavian" writer. As Bjørneboe remains for the most part untranslated into English, the objectives of the study are two-fold: to introduce the works of Jens Bjørneboe, and to provide a detailed commentary on influence in his works from classic and contemporary sources.

The first chapter serves as an introduction to Bjørneboe, supplying a concise overview of his literary career as playwright, novelist, poet and essayist. In chapter two, his early achievements as a poet and novelist are discussed. The point of departure for the earliest works lies in the spiritual system of Anthroposophy and the powerful influence of Rilke. The chapter culminates with commentaries on his highly controversial debate-novels. The third chapter is an extended study of his pivotal trilogy known as "The History of Bestiality": Frihetens
øyeblikk (1966), Kruttårnet (1970) and Stillheten (1973). While the trilogy represents a confrontation with Western culture, it also depicts modern man in a world devoid of values and meaning. Here, the influence of Nietzsche and Sartre are traceable. In the trilogy, Bjørneboe's thinking on violence and society intersects with that of Michel Foucault and René Girard. The fourth chapter is a discussion of Bjørneboe and the theater. As a Norwegian dramatist who rejected Ibsen's form of theater, he found recourse alternately in Brecht, Strindberg and Tennessee Williams. Bjørneboe's major plays can best be understood in light of this set of influences. The fifth and final chapter examines the "anarchism" which was Bjørneboe's final philosophical resting place. The parallels with Camus's ideas in L'Homme revolté are readily discernible. Bjørneboe's final novel, Haiene (1974), which was to commence his "History of Freedom," is a sea novel which invites comparison with Conrad, particularly Conrad's conception of history. Bjørneboe's letters and unpublished autobiography show an increasing preoccupation with the split between social and metaphysical concerns. His final months, and his assessment of his own literary accomplishment, are reviewed in light of this conflict.
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PREFACE

This volume deals with the works of an author of international stature from a small language area: Scandinavia. Jens Bjørneboe's writings are at present almost impossible to procure in English translation. Additionally, commentaries on his work—such as those by Steiner Lem, Kaj Skagen and others in Norwegian, and one work by Janet Garton in English—do not vigorously set about to place his literary achievements in the mainstream European traditions which are the bedrock of his art. These works by Scandinavians or Scandinavianists, while making an invaluable contribution, do not always cast their lights on his value as a genuinely European author.

Having said that, a new problem arises: How to trace "influence" from the great works and currents of Western literature and thought in the oeuvre of a writer who—although he is a lightning rod for so many of those crosscurrents and impulses—has rarely been published in English. That is the one language in which an author's works must be published, in our day, if they are to receive recognition in the world at large.

The task at hand, therefore, is two-fold. His literary production must be presented before it is examined. In order to reflect on the works of Jens Bjørneboe in light of the broad range of literary and artistic influences evident in his output—or works by
others that parallel his own due to "trends" in the consciousness of our century--it is first necessary to "walk" a reader through Bjørneboe's oeuvre. Recourse to biographical material is also required. The story of the evolution of his writings, inseparable from the public, political and private life of a writer of Bjørneboe's stamp, itself serves as a narrative: a kind of text with units of meaning, with a plot, with recurring themes and motifs, as Bjørneboe consciously wove his life into his literary creations, and his creations wove their way into his life. So once again, though an important aim of this study is to set the work of the Norwegian Jens Bjørneboe synchronically and diachronically in the traditions of European and Western literature where he belongs, it must provide an overview of his work at the same time.

As it turns out, large parts of the opening chapters dwell on Bjørneboe's works primarily. There are exceptions, such as a discussion of the debt which Bjørneboe owes to Rilke at the very beginning of his literary career. The exegesis of the "History of Bestiality" also requires that a large proportion of the space be used to illuminate this remarkable trilogy itself. It is in the examination of the trilogy, however, that the direct influence of such diverse sources as Nietzsche, Strindberg and Dante will come into play--as well as parallels in the works of some of Bjørneboe's contemporaries such as Michel Foucault and René Girard. The
chapter on Björneboe and the theater supplies some of the clearest evidence in the investigation into what his primary influences were, for it is possible to enlist the aid of his many essays on theater, drama and performance. His rejection of Ibsen leads him to new sources of esthetic and philosophic inspiration. The tension between the dual influences of Strindberg and Brecht forms the heart of the matter here—not only vis-à-vis his plays, but in the evolution of his thought as well. After a certain point even these two figures do not suffice, and Björneboe looks to the other side of the Atlantic for yet another inspiration: Tennessee Williams. The final chapter contains an analysis of Björneboe's affinities with Joseph Conrad and Albert Camus, building on close examinations of works by these two writers, who would not perhaps be recognized for the blood brothers they are, except for the way they intertwine in the thought and esthetics of this particular twentieth century writer. By the end of the chapter, the hope is that it will be clear that to approach Björneboe solely as a Scandinavian writer, by itself, cannot suffice for a writer who is so many other things besides being Scandinavian. We have here a Norwegian who was not a Norwegian writer. We have, in a way, a writer whose very language—in terms of his literary style—was not really his native language. It should become evident that a comparatist approach to this author's work is demanded by the work itself.
Given what this study has set out to do, appropriate time must be given to each genre in which Bjørneboe worked, since for him each genre had its special use. The poems approach the world from a metaphysical vantage point, the plays take a polemical approach, and the novels resolve the dialectical tension between the other two by combining both impulses. Therefore, because we are dealing with a "split" author, who expresses different sorts of content through different forms—all the genres will be discussed. The essays, a form in which Bjørneboe was an undeniable master, are assigned no section of their own, as they provide glimpses into the raw material which later became plays and novels, as well as insights into the system of thought that lies behind his artistic production. References to the essays will be dispersed throughout.

A close examination of Bjørneboe's use of language is not one of the objectives of this study. Due to the fact that Bjørneboe's work still needs to be presented and discussed as a whole—and because questions of form and style were secondary to him, even when at work on his most remarkable formal experiments--space will not allow for it this time. Even so, his peculiar "internationalized" Norwegian, his conscious use of a sharp-hewn, non-ornamental style--which favors classical rhetoric over the intuitive style that is supposed to be "modern"--will provide fertile material for some future investigation. It will be touched on in a general way here.
Following the example of publications that deal extensively with works on literature from the Scandinavian languages—inaccessible to the vast majority of even the most erudite readers in other countries—the passages from Norwegian texts quoted will be my translations into English. For the sake of consistency, translations will be provided for sources quoted from other languages. When the translations are not my own, the English version being used will be found in the "works cited." In most cases, with the exception of Scandinavian languages, quotes in the notes appear in the original language. The remainder of the notes are generally content notes, and readers are asked to refer to the "works cited" if they want to check a source.

I am indebted to a great number of people who have given me their time, and guidance. I name here only a few among that number in Scandinavia: Harald Bache-Wiig at the University of Oslo; Magne Bleness, NRK (Norsk Rikskringkasting) in Oslo; Haagen Ringness, NRK; Kåre Santesson at Stockholm Stadsteatern; Marta Vestin of Friteatern in Stockholm; Fredrik Wandrup; Therese Bjørneboe; and my very special gratitude to Tone Tveiteraa Bjørneboe.
Auf und wieder gehn die Posten
Keiner, keiner kann hindurch.
Flucht wird nur das Leben kosten
Vierfach ist umzäunt die Burg.
Wir sind die Moorsoldaten
Und ziehen mit dem Spaten
Ins Moor.

Anonymous: As it appears
in Bertolt Brecht's
Furcht und Elend des Dritten
Reiches

ONE / INTRODUCTION TO BJØRNEBOE

1.
In the beginning of the 1930s a little book began a journey through Europe. Its message was urgent, but it faced many obstacles. In the first place, it portrayed a reality so bizarre and so absurd that many would have denied that it was an accurate account of the acts of their contemporaries—of human beings living in their own world. In the second place, it was written in German, and the book had to pass through a language barrier in each new land in which it appeared. Nevertheless, there were some strong spirits who were willing to give the material a long hard look—the more difficult because of the glaring truth it reflected—and the book was soon translated into the major European languages. In this way Die Moorsoldaten\(^1\) carried its terrible message to a world that was not yet ready to
receive it: a decade before the time when the post-war revelations of the existence of concentration camps, of the attempted extermination of ethnic and political groups, and the massive complicity of millions of "good" citizens, would receive widespread publicity. Years before the outbreak of World War II, the book by an escaped concentration camp inmate named Wolfgang Langhoff was lying open. The truth was there for anyone who could read. Few figures with influence in Europe or abroad acknowledged the evidence it provided at the time. Absolutely no governments did, at least not publicly. *Die Moorsoldaten*, which took its name from a song which was sung by the inmates of the earliest Nazi concentration camps, gave a depiction of what National Socialism really was, and a good idea of what it held in store for humanity. In retrospect, of course, its depictions from the mid-thirties seem tame by comparison with all that was to follow. Bertolt Brecht was one of the authors who took up the task of getting the word out early, and drew on the book for a scene in his dramatic expose of Nazism, *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches*. When the world finally came to face the facts, the facts could only be used as lessons for the future. And very few on either side would come to recognize their complicity when the winds had finally ceased to howl.

In 1935 the little book fell into the hands of a fifteen year-old Norwegian. This particular adolescent had been raised in the overclass household of a ship owner
who had served as Consul for Belgium, a household in which German was spoken as much as Norwegian, with French playing a close second to both of the other languages. Jens Bjørneboe had grown up with two strong yearnings: one for the raw life at sea, the other for the refined culture of central Europe. Since he was effectively bilingual and had begun to read German literature voraciously at a young age, he might well have read the book about the concentration camp Oranienburg in the original language at this early date. Perhaps he was ahead of his times not only by virtue of his knowledge of and fascination with all things German, but also by virtue of a compulsive inability to look away from even the worst mankind has to offer—and as well, his propensity to use his intellect and his fantasy to step into the shoes of the victims of this "worst" side. "As I read," he later wrote, "the sun grew black. Since that time I have never been truly happy. Several years later it was impossible for me to grasp that the world was still in existence." He read the book in one sitting, and by his own account, the almost physical shock of the experience lay the groundwork for his entire authorship.

The book was his first "meeting with reality" ("møte med virkeligheten"), as he came to refer to it. It is not a passive concept. It implies not simply a vision of the world, but a collision. It is a fall from grace and presupposes the choice of either an eternal struggle with the world, or surrender resulting in selective blindness,
complicity with oppression and even bestiality—the worst sort of "mauvaise foi," to use Sartre's well-known term. Human beings have often chosen to relinquish their right to use their own eyes to see. "The world is dark, gruesome and frightening," he wrote in 1972 in his introduction to his first novella *Duke Hans (Hertug Hans)*—another book that was dismissed in its time, and was not published until twenty-four years later:

The world—objectively—we cannot portray. Our only possibility is to describe the encounter between reality and a mind ... Thus, the book ties in consistently with everything that I have written later: the meeting of mind with reality, with the world of injustice and bestiality—with the incomprehensible fact that a world that is in itself beautiful, has become evil and corrupt. (HH 7)

2.

From his discovery of Langhoff's book about the Oranienburg concentration camp up to his death by his own hand on May 10th 1976, Jens Bjørneboe would continue to look where others were not looking. As a poet, essayist, playwright and novelist in the vanguard of post-war culture in Scandinavia, he would continue to look into the dark places and bring to light what publishers preferred to ignore, make popular causes out of unpopular issues, and break ground for new forms which defied the esthetic standards of the time in northern Europe. It has been said of him that during his life he functioned as Norway's "bad conscience."³ But his significance as an artist rests
upon the contradictions and inconsistencies in his career, rather than his adherence to any consistent political or artistic "line." Having begun as a painter and poet with exclusively esthetic and metaphysical concerns--and personal opinions which can for the most part be described as conservative--it was in fact through his engagement with his art that his engagement with society evolved. At his death he was a writer at the forefront of post-war Scandinavian culture. For almost a decade it could have been said that he was simultaneously Norway's most important novelist and playwright.

As of this writing only three of his novels have been published in English: one of them because it was a succès du scandale as "pornography" in the rest of Scandinavia when it was banned and confiscated in Norway. The book that was the first volume of the novel trilogy which is his most important work was released by a major U.S. publisher, received consistently positive reviews, and strangely, was allowed to die on the shelves in the hardcover edition. Almost all of his major plays have been translated, but have lain unproduced in the drawers of English and American theaters. This, despite periodic bursts of enthusiasm for his work on the continent, notably in Germany. In his time he was certainly one of the most interesting theater writers in northern Europe--both as theorist and dramatist--while most other writers in the area had been, and have been, suffering in the shadow of Ibsen and
Strindberg for what will soon be a century.

It is an age-old evasion to explain an author's difficulties by the notion that he was "ahead of his time." It is simply enough sometimes to be out of step with fashion. In literature, this often manifests itself in the dismissal of an author or a book that is not "modern." Duke Hans, according to Bjørneboe, was considered "un-modern." That is, it lacked "the stamp of the times" which changes from one period to another, and which "one is inclined to regard, in each period, as the only solution for literature." He adds further: "Young authors, especially, must 'belong to their time' even if that 'time' only lasts a while" (HH 6).

Fourteen novels, six major plays (not including several children's plays) six volumes of poetry, eight volumes of essays, over twenty translations (including Strindberg, Brecht, Schiller, Wedekind, Sade), two screen plays and an unfinished autobiography--this is the legacy of a writer who died at fifty-six, an age when many of Europe's most important authors had yet to complete their best work. They constitute Bjørneboe's accounts or "protocols" of the meeting with reality. The essays--on books, people, prisons, cats, politics, the third world and theater--are always deeply engaged. They tend toward extremes of unreserved enthusiasm for his subject, to direct and killing polemics, often highly humorous for all but the victim with their tongue-in-cheek irony. Many of
the best essays constitute material which Bjørneboe put to the test before developing and refining it in novels or plays. The poetry meanwhile is often metaphysical, oriented toward symbol and myth, executed with sense for form that is Rilkean. Rilke is the writer who most influenced Bjørneboe in his early years, and the poems display the influence most clearly. The novels, meanwhile, bring his metaphysical perspectives together with a deep sense of disturbance in response to the history, politics and culture of the West. His central work of fiction is the trilogy known as the History of Bestiality, which includes Frihetens øyeblikk (Moment of Freedom), Kruttårnet (The Powderhouse) and Stillheten (The Silence). Here the influences from the continent below the Scandinavian peninsula emerge to light. No sooner does one become evident, than it gives way to the next one: Novalis and Nietzsche, Brecht and Strindberg, Kafka and Camus, Boccaccio and, an elusive phantom that hovers behind the trilogy like a confessor--Dante.

The plays, meanwhile, show the influence of Brecht, and the other great non-naturalistic theater traditions (including circus, mime and wrestling), though the dialogue itself is always in a style that is distinctively Bjørneboe. His break-through as an original dramatist in Scandinavia, the second in Norway to cast off the Ibsenite leg-irons--the first was Nordahl Grieg--has to do with an attitude towards originality shared by most of the
avant-garde in theater whose work has proven to be of lasting value. This is an originality which comes of a return to theater's origins. The most striking achievements here are Fugleelskerne (The Bird Lovers) and Semmelweis. With Bjørneboe, as with many other writers who have the ability to work in different genres, the drama emerges as the most explicitly social form. All of the plays can be viewed as polemics, in the sense that they contain attacks on central facts of our society and our existence which have become institutionalized. Here, Bjørneboe is of course showing traces of an inheritance from the Scandinavian tradition also evident in the work of Holberg, Ibsen and Strindberg. The undisguised influence of Brecht certainly only puts this aspect of his work further into relief. In contrast to this, the novels of Bjørneboe are very often a lonely world of perception. That is not to say they are introverted or private, but they have the "dream-like quality which our half-conscious meeting with reality always has" (HH 7).

3.
Bjørneboe's development as a writer might be best described as a trajectory from esthetic and spiritual concerns tied in with his deep involvement with the spiritual movement of Anthroposophy, to his final philosophical resting place: anarchism. Yet one has to be cautious in proposing that
kind of trajectory, since both impulses are evident at both the beginning and end of his writing career. Even so, his meetings with reality will turn increasingly into conflicts with society and authorities—charges in the media, charges and countercharges in the courts, the banning of one of his books, outright prosecution, personal threats against him, and ongoing critical assessments of "unsatisfactory" trends in his work—all this taking place in a country that would appear to be the most innocent of modern democracies. And today, when his stature in his own country has begun to take on the proportions of a myth, his work has up till now been passed over in virtual silence in the English speaking world: that language area where an author's work must appear if he is to be acknowledged by the world at large. The irony in this is that he never was a particularly "Norwegian" writer. He never consciously drew attention to a national or Nordic sensibility, as did Hamsun, for example—nor did he show an affinity for northern and Norwegian nature, isolation and fantasy, like that we find in Tarjei Vesaas. He was internationalist in almost every sense of the word. It might even be said that he was a writer without a language. Bjørneboe's use of language shows constant evidence of his consciously allowing it to be corrupted by the German he grew up with, the Swedish he was surrounded by in exile, and the Danish-like riksmål spellings he would use if it suited his purpose. When he brought his first travel pieces to the editor of an Oslo
daily paper, the editor's response was favorable, though he asked, "Where in the world have you learned your Norwegian?" He said he had "never seen the like," and asked permission to "translate it into Norwegian," as he gave the aspiring writer an advance from his own pocket (Ringness 16).

Late in his life, seasoned by many cultural battles, Bjørneboe remarked that he never intended to visit a theater again: "It smells of the piss of the barricades" (OT 20). But until the end of his life the barricades would never come down—and paradoxically, neither did the loneliness which he always associated with the discovery of truth.

There is, though, a confederation of such disturbers of the peace, even in their solitude. Particularly for those who are international in their spirit and perspective, this confederation extends over borders and recognizes its own in any place and under all kinds of circumstances. How limited their numbers are is made evident by the ways in which they often encounter each other. In 1959 Bjørneboe was making an extended stay at Brecht's Berliner Ensemble in East Berlin. He became engaged in a conversation there, in which he began to describe the little book about the Oranienburg concentration camp that had changed the direction of a Norwegian child's life. His interlocutor stops him.

"Ich bin Langhoff," he says. "I wrote that book."
1.

In 1948 Jens Bjørneboe wrote his first novel *Hertug Hans* (Duke Hans), which was rejected, practically speaking, by every publisher in Norway. It would prove to be one of his most fascinating works, when finally it was published twenty-five years later. The book, a long novella, tells the story of the frail younger brother of King Christian IV of Denmark. Christian sends his despondent brother first to the wars in the Netherlands to support the Spaniards against the Protestants, an example of the Realpolitik of those times. It is there that Hans experiences the cruelty of the encounters between the competing ideologies of Europe in the Flemish rebellion against Spain. Later Christian sends him on a journey deep into a semibarbarous Russia to seek the hand of the Czar's daughter. Thus Christian engineers, for the sake of political expediency, an encounter between two antipodal personality types, for the ultra sensitive Hans comes up against the figure of Ivan the Terrible. This is the first exploration of the meeting between mind and the world, a theme which will much more self-consciously absorb Bjørneboe as a mature writer.

Hans sees himself reflected in the faces and fates of
others—of doubles, we might say. There is his brother, the absolute ruler of more than half of Scandinavia. There is also the young Spanish general Spinola who sees in Hans his own likeness. Looking at himself in a mirror, the rapidly aging youth Spinola—a man of power despite himself—reflects, and reflects in fear. "It was a stranger's face":

It showed a man who had come to the border region of life, to the land of images and of broken relations from which none turned back. It showed a person that stood outside of the law and would belong to all ages' and all nations' brotherhood of the rebellious, the desperate and the suicidal. (HH 57)

As he wastes away towards his death in the Czar's palace while awaiting the engagement confirmation which never arrives, Hans sees something of himself in the face of a young monk waiting to be broken on the wheel in the courtyard. His last seemingly arbitrary act in life is to ask the Czar to spare the monk's life. The meaning of this final gesture will become clearer when we return to Bjørneboe's concept of compassion (med-lidelse) in his later works.

The book was rejected in one case by a publisher who felt that the young author had not portrayed the details of historical reality, particularly in Russia of the time, available in Axel Gyllenstierne's accounts of Hans's travels in Russia. "For any reader with any background in history," wrote the publisher's consultant, "these exteriors do not give the impression of truth." The consultant perceived an old-fashioned chronical style, confessing meanwhile that the
saga had "power, atmosphere, beauty," and showed a "musical sensibility" (Wandrup 46). The demands for period realism were still the demands of the time. The consultant might have been cued about the type of novel he had before him by the role played by the famous Nordic astrologer Tyge Brahe in the narrative—a clear indicator that its ambitions were something quite different from that of literary realism, or historical fiction. Brahe sees both the fates of Hans and Christian in the stars. Yet it is Brahe who says that it is for individuals to affect the destinies which the stars hold for them. The book thus falls into a rising existentialist tradition in using history, in order to show a world with an absent center, a search for values in the absence of God and received beliefs, or in the face of a universe that is indifferent or even malignant.

After the total rejection of his first literary effort in Norway, Bjørneboe departs for Germany in 1948—a Germany still in ruins. The parallel with Hans's quest into the the chaotic and barbarous lands of the Czar could be drawn, but for the fact that Bjørneboe's star is only preparing to rise. What he encounters in the bombed, shell-wracked quarters of urban Germany will provide him with new impetus. Having grown up in a household which was functionally bilingual in Norwegian and German, and with German art and literature forming the foundation of his cultural education, he is deeply torn himself by the contradiction between the culture and the cruelty in what was traditionally the most European of European
societies. He had travelled to Germany one decade before with his mother: in 1939 they had to break off their travels due to the declaration of war. The contrast between the feverish festivities of ten years before, and the ruins he wandered through in 1948, will provide the menacing charge of the final chapters of his pivotal work, *Moment of Freedom* (*Frihetens øyeblikk*):

Outside the crush and bustle was greater than before, there were still more uniforms, and lorries with soldiers drove through the overflowing streets. People shouted and sang, and some broke out into enthusiastic fight songs. It was a folk-festival and there was an intoxication of joy. I didn't understand what it was all about.

It was only a bit later in the evening that it dawned on me that the people were celebrating the outbreak of the second world war. (FO 201)

Between those first two trips to Germany lies the period of Bjørneboe's exile in Stockholm. During the Stockholm period he becomes deeply engaged with Anthroposophy through the Anthroposophic Christian Society, and begins to study painting under Isaac Grünewald, a student of Matisse (Wandrup 41). He is increasingly obsessed with artistic form during this time, developing a special interest in medieval and Byzantine painting. His own direction veers towards impressionism, for he is concerned above all with light, the play between light and darkness, light and color—preoccupations that will show up in works like *Little Boy Blue*, or *Blåmann*. Slowly his works move away from static motifs. "Gradually he also transformed his style," writes his biographer, Fredrik Wandrup. "He stops
painting neutral landscapes. He begins to paint narratively, more symbolically" (45).

His purely esthetic obsessions during this period will later strike him as absurd, or worse, in the context of the world events of those times. It will become his core problem as a writer to deal with the "hole" in his life, a period of lacking awareness, indifference. We shall see, however, that even during his most engaged phases as a politicized writer, the interest in the power of form will never dissipate. For example, in 1963 he writes of Cézanne: "He rebuilds our image of the world / so everything is force, tension and music / completely recast in the heat of his look...." (SD 177). After the war, his travels result in a series of travel epistles and articles which are published in the major daily Aftenposten. Assembled into book form, the essay volume Lanterner (Lanterns) is refused by the major publishers Aschehoug and Gyldendal, but with positive comments. Meanwhile his first handful of poems are published in Ordet by his cousin, the well-known poet and translator André Bjerke. These poems are soon bound into his first published book, titled simply Poems (Dikt) in 1951. It receives critical salvos for its cool style and obsessive attention to form. Paal Brekke writes in Dagbladet that it "is seldom, very seldom here at home, that such an artistically conscious debutant comes forth." Brekke compares the poems to "the pale and immobile beauty of smooth marble" (qtd. in Wandrup 50).

Prior to the publication of the first poetry volume in
1951, however, Bjørneboe makes yet another trip to Germany where, while wandering through the limbo of ruins and the shades of a recently dead epoch, he finds himself at the portals of a much greater journey, a journey into human evil which will lead him deeper for decades to come. Documents from the German physicians' trial are put into his hands by a scientist-lawyer whom he meets (Wandrup 51). They detail the painful medical experiments which National Socialist doctors conducted on human beings on a massive scale. While pondering the inconceivable fact of these events, he also makes the acquaintance of the surviving family of one Dr Rascher, an upstanding and forthright citizen, who became one of the most notorious medical butchers during his clinical working hours. While confronting the historical fact, then, he also becomes intimate with the situation of this fine family man, through those who knew him best. Latching on to Rascher's case as a possible key to the phenomenon of Nazism, and the complicity of science with barbarism, he later reflects that "the insight into this sea of inhuman evil and cruelty was the cause of the many-year long depression which followed" (FHG 52).

2.
These events provide the frame for his first published novel Before the Cock Crows (Før hanen galen, 1952). Written first as a play, which was rejected by at least one theater for the reason that "the public runs away from this kind of material,"
Bjørneboe transformed it into a documentary novel of particular concision and tension—notably, some years before the documentary novel came into vogue (OT 7). The frame of the novel, according to Fredrik Wandrup, is purely autobiographical material (52). Dr Rascher becomes Dr Reynhardt. The author tells first of his introduction to Reynhardt's young SS assistant Max—who is now living out his last days as a debilitated, bullet-ridden cripple in a makeshift hospice in a ruined tenement. Max is a creature of his times and the system—taken during his formative years and inserted into a value system which nurtured his cruellest impulses. He is now a cynical, contraption of brutality who scorns and abuses even the kind people who want to nurse him through his last days.

There is also a description of a meeting with a peculiar Norwegian named Lyngby, who rarely speaks his native language, and is living a life dedicated to alleviating human suffering after the war. Finally comes the meeting with Reynhardt's family.

Ensuing on this is the fictional recreation of the events of the past based upon the documentation available in the present. The book is split into two tiers, the first of which is dominated by the author voice, and the second in which the author attempts to be absent, allowing the third person and omniscient narrative to move forward without author speculation or comment. It is a technique that will recur in later Bjørneboe novels. The autobiographical frame—used in a simplistic and schematic fashion when compared to the
sophisticated manipulation of autobiographical and fictional material in his trilogy more than a decade later—is an early indicator of how the myth of the man Bjørneboe itself has entered the literature of his native country.

Juxtaposed with Reynhardt is the hardened SS officer Heidebrand. He has chosen a life in quest of power and status in the hierarchy of the system, and unlike Reynhardt who allows himself to be drawn in through weakness, and the obfuscation that he is serving science, Heidebrand is quite conscious of his choice. "They wanted it that way," says Heidebrand of former friends who have ended up in camps. "They wanted to lie beneath the wheel. And I wanted to sit up in the carriage" (FHG 125). But Heidebrand is also able to make the choice to drop out of the madness. He had once chosen evil, but he has the will to choose his way out of it again. If Reynhardt is evidence of a human being's infinite ability to be passively shaped by the world and social forces, Heidebrand is evidence of the opposite: that a human being has infinite possibilities for choosing his direction and his life. He asserts that he has broken with his life once, "And I can break out again. And again! And again! There are no bounds to how often a man can break with his past. Every moment he can do it!" (168). Heidebrand's resurrection in the form and name of his dead Norwegian cellmate at the end of the war provides a kind of hope that spirals forth through the vicious cycle of evil institutions making evil men, and evil men making institutions to carry out further evil. Although Bjørneboe poses a
contradiction in this portrayal of human nature by playing off a Reynhardt against a Heidebrand, it cannot counteract the weight of pessimism the raw material supplies. The dedication of the novel reads: "This book is written to the memory of the victims of the blindness of heart and the chilling of spirit which has long characterized modern science."

In 1967 literary critic Ole Storm of the influential Copenhagen daily Politiken would turn his sights on Bjørneboe's internationally acclaimed novel, Moment of Freedom, by citing Bjørneboe's first published novel: "This, in Norway, famous novel, serves as an extension of Bjørneboe's earlier novel of indignation, Before the Cock Crows (which in my opinion used the German concentration camp doctors' cynical experiments with prisoners as an excuse to write sensationalistically about perversion and sadism)."

During the court action that Bjørneboe took against Storm for libel, he remarked that his literary career was devoted to the problem of evil:

It is my theme once and for all—it is not a theme I have chosen for myself; it has been an absolute necessity, never a choice. The things I have written have been what nowadays is called "engaged" writing. But it has never been a willful engagement—it would have been more pleasant to write about idylls about flowers and about harmless things ... I've never been able to do that, I have been an "engaged" writer against my will.... (Wandrup 54)

3.

The year after Before the Cock Crows, Bjørneboe's previous breakthrough as a poet is reinforced with a second volume of
poems—*Ariadne* (1953). The poems in both poetry volumes show an overriding concern with form—often traditional forms, sonnets or variations on sonnet form—and the content and concerns themselves are either formal or metaphysical. The subjects of politics, sensualism, depression, alcoholism and other worldly matters do not make a showing in much of this work. There is a frequent use and re-use of the Passion as a central motif. Bjørneboe is at this time a teacher at the Steiner School, which he quite literally helped to build, together with his first wife, Lisel. The emphasis the Anthroposophists place upon myth deeply affects his teaching as well as his art. Immersed during this period in the works of Rilke, he captures an image from a myth, a work of art, and attempts to light up the tensions in it—aiming to capture the essence through showing the tension—much as Rilke did in the *Neue Gedichte* collections.3

The poem "Easter: The Basket Maker" ("Påske: Kurvmakeren") shows how Bjørneboe tilts the Rilkean mode towards his own themes, and with an innuendo which is the barest hint of what is to come—both in the story of the Passion, and in Bjørneboe's own progression as a writer.

Here I have made something quite new never seen before: A crown of thorns.
I, who dwell in Jerusalem
 --my home's on the street of basket weavers--
a quiet man with workshop, wife and children;
I know the work I do quite well
and such a crown I've never made before.

I cut my branches from a tree of roses,
seven thin branches, pliable and long,
seven soft thorny branches were enough.
On those branches there were many, many
of this year's young roses sprouted forth.

I put all of the extras in a mug
--the dark, red and the wet, green--
so they gave a happy fragrance to my house,
and burn out rather slowly like a fire.
But no one at the workshop here can see
what they shall do with such a crown as that.

(SD 81)

The influence Rilke exerted on Bjørneboe the poet might
be said to be based on three affinities: personal,
philosophical and formal. The personal experience of the world
is described by both as something akin to being a traveler
among natives--and even that of an arrival on a new planet. In
"Der Einsame" Rilke writes:

Like one who's traveled over foreign seas
I am always among the natives;
the full days are decked out on their tables,
but to me things distant make sense.

Here a new world rises in my view
Which is perhaps uninhabited like the moon.... 4

In "Emigranten," one of his first poems, Bjørneboe makes a
statement that is remarkably similar:

In all the rooms with darkened blankets,
in all the beds in which I have lain
in cities where I could not remain
no inhabitant even knows my name.

(...)  
I am a child of foreign planets.
A greater nameless thing drew me powerfully from faces, lands and cities round me.⁵

In addition to the affinity for Rilke's personal perspective, there is a common strain in the philosophical systems, which suggest that a striving towards death is the most direct route to illumination. Rilke's poem "Römische Sarkophag" ("Roman Sarcophogi") describes an ornamented sarcophagus with rings, carved idols, ribbons and cut glass, in which "wandering in slow decomposition / a thing dissolving slowly lay-- / till it was swallowed by the unknown mouth / that never speaks (Where will a brain arise / and think to put it to good use.)"⁶ We might paraphrase, "If only death could speak." Bjørneboe's similar thought is--if only death could walk: if only we could live, fully aware of our mortality. In a poem handling similar motifs, "Lazarus," we find the kernel of thought which will flower into a whole system of thought concerning death-awareness.⁷ Lazarus arises to eat with the others:

And these who all had death within them now saw that he who was now filled with that alone --who had eaten his fill of death--he could free himself from the death within him and return.

Now he came again and had more life in him than they. (SD 48)
Neither Bjørneboe nor Rilke are exclusively poets of darkness. As a poet, Bjørneboe does not have Rilke's occasional harlequin-like ability to find wisdom in a light joke—as in "Das Karussell", where Rilke describes a world of movement and color, "And every now and then a white elephant." Bjørneboe's humor tends more toward the grotesque. Epicureanism and hedonism when it comes to cuisine and drink are often driven to the point of the manic. He does, on occasion, set out to show that life can be full indeed for a Lazarus returned to the dinner table. In a long poem, "On Places on Earth and Food I Like" ("Om steder på jorden og mat jeg liker") we are presented with a litany of pleasurable items that is a cross between a pan-European menu and one of Walt Whitman's lyrical lists. "In Würzburg / I ate a carp, blau gesotten, / in its own fat. It passed my gills / grazed my tear ducts / and went in a lightning flash / through my brain. / I drank Mosel with it. / During this meal I was / unconscious" (SD 120). Rilke had the ability to draw distant beacons of light from the thickest fog of darkness. In "Aus Einer Sturmnacht" he writes: "On such nights my little sister's growing / who lived before me and died before me, quite small. / There have been many such nights since then: / She must be growing lovely. Soon they'll all be proposing." This sense of expectation, of something apparently lost that is growing—a pregnant darkness, you might say—is to be found in Bjørneboe's "Still Night" ("Stille Natt") as it is in Rilke's stormy night:
The night tonight is holy.
Something will happen.
It is not simply snow that will
come down from heaven.

The night tonight is holy.
Someone will die tonight.
New-sown and fearful and faint
heaven is spawning in ice
where it's shining and smooth on the street.

The night tonight is holy.
Someone will be born tonight.
Our dark, freezing globe
is not forsaken, quite.
From her luminous sisters
someone is coming tonight.
(SD 50-51)

The apprehension, this waiting for something to emerge from
darkness--implying a belief in the essential fertility of
darkness--is very similar to the sense of apprehension which
will dominate one of Bjørneboe's final novels: The Silence
(Stillheten). It is also indicative of Bjørneboe's conviction
that truth is discovered in solitude.

In the poem "Ischariot" Bjørneboe finds less evil in a
figure representing a criminal element than in the good
citizens around him. The Ischariot figure is even a necessary
catalyst to bring about the ascendency of Christ ("What would
the whole thing have come to without me?") He played his role
in destiny, in a design for a holy ritual.

It was a spring. And the branch I chose
was heavy with the smells of flowers that snowed.
So we were both fruit--on each our tree.
It was before Pesah; they'd whitewashed every house
Before the Sabbath the end had to be attained:
The others--fled. Just we two remained.

( SD 17)

In the mid-sixties the poem "Flowers for Genet" ("Blomster for Genet") would expand on the theme, as Bjørneboe's endless plumbing of the crown of thorns motif continued:

Maria, mother of all affliction
Name our names in your benedictions
We're all bearing crowns of thorns
We are, each one, sons of yours.

Procurers and sodomites
Exhibitionists and transvestites
Pederasts, fetishists
Poets and masochists
Morphine addicts, alcoholics
Virgin, all afflictions' mother
Console Genet, our poor brother
He too bears a crown of thorns.

Thieves, whores and Genet
We hanging one side and the other
Of your son on afflictions' tree
Know what the world's savior suffers

Virgin mother, only we
Know what the cup of mercy means:
The coronal thorns turn to roses.

( SD, 137)

At this juncture, 1965, poems like this one are taking on a new cadence, with sharpened imagery and a sense of directness which is also a result of the continuing influence that German poetics wields over Bjørneboe. It is simply that he has moved
from one dominating pole of influence in German poetry of the early twentieth century, that of Rilke, to the other—that of Brecht. For those who know it, the appeal for absolution in the poem above will perhaps have a certain ring of Brecht's "Ballade, in der Macheath Jedermann Abbitte Leistet" ("Ballad in which Macheath Begs All Men for Forgiveness"), the religious content of the poem notwithstanding. The Marxist, Brecht, nurtured a particular sentiment favoring absolution for the outcasts of society which, for example, comes through in the poem about the infanticide Marie Farrar ("But you, I beg you, check your wrath and scorn / For man needs help from every creature born"). As with Brecht, Bjørneboe had always written a considerable proportion of his poetry in a meter and rhyme, often with short lines, that would be conducive to musical settings for the purpose of theater or cabaret.

Even in his earliest works, Bjørneboe is not bent upon an uncritical or devout portrayal of Christian imagery, icons and ritual. He was always quite capable of turning them on their head, so that any lies would come rattling out. In his first collection, the poem "The Monk" ("Munken I-II") depicts a figure who is torn between the forms of monastic life which he obeys with the utmost devotion, and his deepest inner desires. The first part of the poem—the first of two sonnets—describes his devotion to the holy forms. It opens with the lines: "I am one of those who only loves / where death and pain, considered well and weighed / are shown me. Need for any earthly, close / and fertile love I've never had." It is a
life "formed" so that it is "immobile / and linked to the
spheres of highest thoughts-- / where earth and heaven
meet...." In the second section, the forms of monastic life
are treated with ominous irony:

They praised me and proclaimed: "Brother, you are
immune from God's judgment--you are just.
Of all the brothers you're the only worthy of Him!
You are like one of those giant trees

which can't be battered down by wind and storm.
You serve the Lord, and loyally persevere!"
To this I kept my shameless silence:
for the whole time I was screaming with desire!

Yes, inside me was a dog that I had beaten.
With bared teeth, snarling and afraid
lay something there crippled, bent and howling

and snarled at me like at a wounded captive.
And if I would sometimes join him in his screaming
the entire cloister thought that I was singing.
(SD 25)

The form a poet or artist uses may not only contain, but
may cover over the very thing he is trying to express. In this
way devotion to form becomes a terrible lie, which
simultaneously encages the poet, and fools the world around him
with the facade it puts up. Just as the young painter
Bjørneboe felt constrained by the medium of painting, the poet
Bjørneboe begins to feel constrained by inherited literary
forms. It is startling to look again at this poem in light of
Ortega y Gasset's description of what he saw as a coming formal
revolt against older forms in the arts. He wondered if Western
man did not feel something like the *odium professionis* of medieval monks, in which they were compelled to rebel against the "very rules that had shaped their lives." 

4.

Mythology and story-telling, employing the method of parable, would always be Bjørneboe's most effective tool for getting at the heart of existence. They provided a way for both writer and reader to plumb their own hearts, to reestablish links with a common cultural heritage—and his proof was the ability of myths and story-telling to teach and nourish the creative powers of children. When the socially "engaged" novel *Jonas* (*The Least of These* in English translation) appeared out of the peaceful welfare-state horizon in 1955, bringing on the great "Jonas-debate" on education in Scandinavia, the author's original motives in writing the book seemed to have been forgotten. It became a debate-novel in the Scandinavian tradition: a *tendensroman*. As a result, an important subplot in the novel was disparaged by critics at the time the book came out. It is the story of a sailor who takes the young runaway Jonas under his wing, and with the help of stories from his travels and the old myths, begins nursing the child back to psychic health. The story of their relationship, though, did not seem to fit well with the story of little Jonas and the school system. For Bjørneboe, it can now be asserted, the motif of the sailor and the castaway child was more important
than much else that was in the book. It is a motif which Bjørneboe will return to in his final novel, The Sharks (Haiene).

Jonas is the story of a child who has dyslexia, and because he is apparently unable to learn to read and write like the others, he is increasingly punished and persecuted by the adherents of the school system. Jonas is portrayed as a bright and precocious child, with a powerful but unharnessed creative fantasy. His own anxiety at being unable to read like other children tests his ingenuity to the point that, with the help of his father, he learns all his lessons by memory. When his vigilant teacher Kråka ("crow", with a slight respelling) uncovers the fact that he is still unable to read, she takes measures to have him placed in a school for children with learning disabilities, "Idiotten" or "the Idiot", as the children call it. With the death of the old and humane head master of the school, a new breed of loyal, business-like--and by choice, faceless--educators take control of the school: the "Salamanders", as the narrator calls them, employing Karel Čapek's term. Thus, the fate of Jonas seems sealed. The cornered child once again draws on his resources and hides out on a ship. After the ship embarks, he is discovered. It is then that he meets the sailor--an ordinary seaman on the vessel. It is with the sailor and his store of myths, legends and tales from around the world, that Jonas's education in fact begins. And it is with Jonas, particularly when the two of them return to an alternative school that offers the child
hope, that the sailor himself will discover his potential as a teacher—by sheer virtue of his empathy and solidarity with children.

This different sort of school indisputably draws on the Steiner School in Norway as its model, with the fictional difference, one would imagine, that a number of the faculty are half-broken neurotics, fighting off alcoholism. This inclination of Bjørneboe to resist portrayals of any kind of ideological or theological utopia is an indication, perhaps, of why he eventually, without fanfare, dropped his affiliation with official Anthroposophy—and never was to join a political party which projected any kind of utopia. For when people truly hold out for reason and humanity, in Bjørneboe, a price is exacted of them. When a teacher named Marx, sick and relapsing into alcoholism, asks the sailor to fill in for his geography class, the sailor protests nervously that "it's not my area." The older man reacts with incredulity. "But you, after all, have been in Arabia!" The sailor bows to pressure:

The sailor took the geography class, not in the capacity of a substitute lecturer, but in the capacity of a sailor who had been on leave in the streets of the bazaars and who had ridden a camel on the desert. As proof that he had been there he took with him to the class a dried desert plant which he had stored away in his suitcase since that time. It was a small, black-brown ball of stuff which resembled a combination of leather and withered grass. It was rolled up like a fist, and was light as paper. This desert plant had the capability of drying out and rolling up when the earth beneath it was without water. It became perfectly round and light as dry grass, and then it traveled with the wind—rolled mile after mile back and forth across the Arabian or whichever desert. It could live for decades, up to fifty years this way, without water and nourishment. It struck the sailor that it represented an excellent psychological parallel from the plant kingdom. If it
came to an oasis, to water, then it flattened out and became soft and rosette-shaped, it put down roots and became green again. It was so accustomed to desert temperatures that it preferred to be set in boiling water each time it was resurrected from the dead. Then it bloomed in an instant. The sailor tossed rapidly boiling water on it in front of the class, and the brown ball stretched and flattened out like a fisted hand opening up. He didn't get much further than to this plant during the geography class, and he told this to Marx afterwards. "Excellent," said Marx, "that's how it should be done. So it became a botany class instead—and that, after all, is the same subject." (306-07)

The sailor continues to teach the geography classes, and discovers that it does not stand alone as a subject, but often leads him into zoology, botany, history, and even linguistics. The sailor's story parallels Bjørneboe's own process of discovery as a teacher, and provides an alternative model to the prevailing model for educating children:

He gamboled in unlimited freedom and got great pleasure out of running the lessons this way. It would be easy to organize the subjects with this kind of elbowroom, and get one to cast light on the other. At the same time he experienced that to precisely that degree he prepared for a class, and therefore had something amusing to talk about, all discipline problems ceased because the class came half way to meet him and shared his interest for the things he told. (307-08)

The debate unleashed by the novel was thus far unprecedented in post-war Norway. It became Bjørneboe's own war—though in this case he let the debate rage without taking part very often himself. Offended members of the education establishment, be they conservative or social-democratic, went to attack in the press. The defenders of the book were many as well. The impact of it, ironically, might be attributed to the
very thing which some critics found to be its weakness. Willy Dahl, dean of Norwegian progressive critics (and never wont to give easy points to Bjørneboe) is one of those who perceived this particular "flaw." After praising the book for its depiction of the world of a child, and its passion in attacking uniformity in the schools, he remarks: "Far weaker is the portrayal of the enemy. Jonas's persecutors are only caricatures, only stupid and evil—which weakens the attack of the novel, because it is so easy to demonstrate that that is just not the way it goes in Norwegian public schools" (Dahl 108).

In one of his rare comments upon the debate during the time it was raging, in the article "Når jag skrev Jonas" in the Swedish magazine Bokvännan, Bjørneboe indicates that the "facelessness" of certain characters was calculated. "Evil in the book is not human beings, it is the anonymous, the faceless, it is the 'system'--the great vacuum. That is the demonology of our times; the human being without features or a face" (BOM 141). In later works, in the quest to find something identifiable and authentic in human beings of the post-Auschwitz age, who seem no longer to be trusted, Bjørneboe will go looking for the child within, the child that was lost to that faceless humanity he describes: the child swept away and abandoned in our increasingly brutal confrontation with the world will be sought. Though this is a kind of metaphysical device, it will rest upon Bjørneboe's profound ability to identify with children. Biographer Wandrup writes that
Bjørneboe, "all his adult life, counted upon children more than his own generation." In Norway the novel Jonas was not accessible to most children, but the story of Jonas reached them indirectly. Needless to say, it particularly reached the many Jonases at the Steiner School. In his article for the Swedish journal, Bjørneboe reported the following anonymous phone call during the period of the debate about his provocative work of fiction:

"Is that Bjørneboe?"

"Yes?"

"Jens Bjørneboe?"

"Yes, that's me."

"This is Jonas. Take it easy!" (140).

5.

In the period after the release of Bjørneboe's next novel, anonymous phone calls would cease to be a source of pleasure. In this case anonymous threats by mail and by phone (sometimes several per day, some threatening his life), together with a pending jail term under the stiff Norwegian laws for driving while intoxicated, would precipitate a period of flight from Norway—which would allow him to indulge his life-long attraction to the Mediterranean.

The novel, Under a Harder Heaven (Under en hårdere himmel) is a depiction of what happened to certain types of people who
were targets of the treason trials immediately after the second world war. These were Norwegians who had not been National Socialists before the occupation, but who cooperated in varying degrees during the Quisling years. Having received a large number of letters from Norwegians in this category who felt they had not been subjected to justice but revenge, Bjørneboe probed the events of the period using a fictional approach similar to the one used in Before the Cock Crows. The action centers on the family of a young girl named Fransiska in a town apparently modeled on Bjørneboe's own home town, Kristiansand. Prior to the occupation, cynical and opportunist elements of both the left and right are jockeying for advantage in the shadow of the impending international catastrophe. Fransiska's father, "the major," is a traditionalist Norwegian military officer whose disgruntlement about the sorry state of Norway's defenses turns to agony as the country is swiftly overrun by the invading forces. The major's fury and disillusionment create an opening in his own mind where Nazi propaganda can enter: that propaganda astutely points up the little country's need for strong defenses in light of the easy manner in which it is buffeted by whatever power wants to take advantage of it. This message cuts through the doubts in which Fransiska's father is embroiled. He broods over German propaganda in the Norwegian papers, until one day his distaste for the Germans is overwhelmed by a nagging and horrifying thought:

At the same time he brooded upon his own situation. Upon the government, the sabotage and the defenses of the Norwegian
Army. He hated the German occupation by far the most because it was provoked and brought on by the government. This became, bit by bit, an all consuming thought with him, the point that held, the axis about which all his thoughts and feelings clustered. And one day it happened....

Hard and dizzyingly it struck him, in the entirely literal sense--like a blow with a stick--it struck him so that he almost fell:

The Nazis were right! (UHH 86-87)

Fransiska goes to Germany early during the war to serve as a nurse in the International Red Cross, out of a youthful sort of Florence Nightingale idealism. She becomes involved with a German soldier. The narrative procedes to tell of the destruction of her family and others like them in the atmosphere of revenge after the war, which offered an excuse for all kinds of inhumanity. Bjørneboe wrote in his afterword to a later edition in 1968, that his ensuing embroilments with the justice system in his country all could be traced back to the suspicions that were aroused from his research on the treason trials, where he found a consistent illegality, brutality in the destruction of the lives of people who acted out of ignorance and limited awareness, and who, though perhaps ignorant, never intended to hurt other human beings. It was his opinion that "the total break of the treason actions with customary forms of justice and morality has been, and is, a mortal wound to Norwegian justice. The contagion from Fascism was transmitted during those days when we were celebrating our democratic freedom" (227-78).

Hedging by his publisher Aschehoug on publishing the book, despite a recommendation from a highly esteemed progressive
literary figure like Sigurd Hoel, caused Bjørneboe to abruptly transfer the contract to another publisher (Wandrup 78). The immediate reactions by the critics were part and parcel of the general howl of indignation which went up around the country. The headline in Dagbladet was "A Botched Literary Work, and a Vulgar Product." Critic Beinset described the book as a "collection of vulgarities ... ungrounded meanness ... falsehoods...." while the author was "a typical muckraker, a confused quarreler." In the journal of literary criticism Vinduet, Kjølve Egeland wrote that "Jens Bjørneboe is steadily taking on new tasks on behalf of modern Norwegian Reaction," adding, "Bjørneboe does not debate, he gnashes his teeth." However, Paal Brekke wrote in Verdens Gang that the book was a work done in haste, and a rough draft of something which could have been "a strong and essential contribution in an important matter.... It could have been another book, a great book" (qtd. in Wandrup 79). The above evaluations of the novel, from important critics, have barely modified with time. Willy Dahl writes in his book on Norwegian prose from the '40s to the '70s that even as documentary writing the book fails: "It quite simply did not happen that way" (Dahl 108). With the number of mail and telephone threats mounting—undoubtedly many people who had served in the resistance and had been involved in the settling of accounts after the war felt themselves to have been dragged through the mud—and with critics breaking from their usual sense of decorum to mount personal attacks—the situation was becoming intolerable. And with all this coinciding with
the dissolution of his first marriage, his departure from the Steiner School, his first serious bouts with depression and alcoholism in years and, ironically, a pending jail term for the charges of driving under the influence of alcohol\textsuperscript{13}—Bjørneboe heads south. The ensuing travels in central Europe and the Mediterranean will last the better part of two years.

6.

The novel Winter in Bellapalma (Vinter i Bellapalma, 1958) is a product of the Mediterranean exile. Light prose, hung on the structure of a comic plot, it is a book that can be read with the sense of ease and pleasure with which it was probably written. The theme of a conflict between growing tourism and the inhabitants of a small village will show up in a much darker work eight years later in the play The Bird Lovers (Fugleelskerne). Satire is never far off when Bjørneboe turns to the comic, but the book is inhabited by a sense of burlesque and farce—such as a fist fight between a dancer who is light on his toes and a bottom heavy fisherman—which makes the narrative essentially disengaged from the darker problems with which he had been grappling. It is born of a need to escape. This period will coincide, however, with a period in the life of the protagonist of Moment of Freedom which he will refer to as the years of wandering in the "land of chaos." This is the flip side of the coin. Rootlessness, wandering, and a
distanced and mystic sense of what it is to seek out again one's own childhood dominate the poems which comprise the volume written at about the same time: *The Big City* (*Den Store by*, 1958). The collection includes the poem "My Heart ("Mitt Hjerte"):

My heart, it is an orphaned child
It has neither home nor abode
it has neither clothes nor shoes or food
it has no bed nor the trust of childhood.
It has no rest. (SD 79)

After two years of travel he returns to Norway to complete work on one of his several artist novels, a *Bildungsroman* about the growth, apprenticeship and pains of a young painter: *Little Boy Blue* (*Blåmann*, 1959).

As a child, the novel's protagonist, Sem, had already found himself set apart from normal society. He is shown as a shy and introverted child brought up by his mother and aunts—a group of oppressive and rather hysterical dark sisters depicted with a one-dimensionality which might be the result of their being seen through the eyes of the child. It is, however, obviously Bjørneboe's intent to portray the "guardian type" ("formyndermennesket"—a concept he develops elsewhere) by way of this little group of pallid moral guardians. The incident in which his penis is painted blue by other boys from his class is only emblematic of the "blue" elements in his life which set him apart. Depression is described in the novel as an experience of an almost physical nature, and the color fits.
Colors play a prominent role in general in the narrative, as in the sequence where the elderly artist Frøken Evjeland attempts to think through what colors would be needed to depict a rain shower: "The color was somewhat different now, and certain places in the cloud cover where it was thinnest, some blue shone through" (99). Or again: "The fact of the matter was that there was some gold in the gray, a kind of weak gleam of light ocher or a bit of neapolitan yellow. But there arose no greenish tones in these encounters of yellow with black. On the palette it was different" (96). The novel methodically takes us through the years with young Sem and his comrades, until in his early thirties, after twenty years of seclusive work, his first attempt to sell his talent by painting the disenchanted wife of an entrepreneur leads to a crisis of purpose. He squanders his substantial remuneration in a volcanic, destructive week-long binge, leaving the woman he lives with and their child in a desperate state during his absence. The frenetic binge turns out to be the end of Sem's consumptive sculptor friend Severin. Severin does not manage to emerge from the dionysian chaos, but Sem--wounded but stronger--surfaces to face all that is both promising and frightening in the career of a disciplined artist.

In the strongest moments of the novel, one senses that the author is drawing on a kind of precise emotional memory of what it is like to come to various crossroads on the path towards a life dedicated to art. Even so, it is done with the advantage of hindsight, and the use of cool method. The fiasco which
dominates the final chapters strikes a contrast to the coolly remembered portrayals in the first part of the book. This exemplifies a paradox in Bjørneboe's authorship which at this point in his career is coming to the surface: on the one hand there is the white-heat writing of the writer facing chaos, the man against the sky, the poet protesting on behalf of modern man, and on the other hand there is the cool practitioner of form, the devotee of impressionism and Byzantine art. Perhaps the book's weakness might also have proven to be its strength—as with Jonas—if the two tendencies had not clashed so much as they do in this book. These striking apollonian and dionysian tendencies, to apply Nietzsche's terminology—in the author, are seeking some way to unify. For a novel that is intended as a relatively straightforward narrative without too much structural experimentation, Little Boy Blue is not a unity.

The novel contains a particularly striking metaphor for periods of weakness and vulnerability as a prelude to growth, and Bjørneboe will return to it in later works:

Perhaps it is with people as it is with the lobster when it is going to change its shell; it has grown and the old armor has become too small. In order to become a bigger lobster it must dare to take a leap of life and death; it must get out of the old shell before the new one is finished; it pulls itself out of the tail-plates and the carapace, out of the secure protective armor—and creeps out on the sea floor among crabs and hungry wrasses, naked and white, a bunch of soft limbs, intestines and nerves at the mercy of its inferiors, exposed to predators which are smaller than it is, to all the lowest things that creep in the sea, alone and defenseless. And for the lobster this is not a pleasant time at all. But if it does not dare then it will go to ground in a casing which is safe and secure for the moment, and murderous in the long run. If
the lobster leaves its armor, then it must find a crevice or a secret hiding place beneath a stone in order to survive until a new and larger shell has been made. A human being must do the same thing when the hour has struck and the transformation is going to take place, and God's mercy on any one of us who doesn't find a hiding place in which to save himself, before the little predators have caught sight of him, so that he can stay there until the new armor has grown. (56)

The two years of travel had put Bjørneboe in a position to reflect on his role as an artist, to publish his artist novel, and to return to Norway, where he was jailed on the lingering charges of driving while intoxicated. Hidden away in prison, waiting for his new armor to grow, he began gathering material for his next emergence as an author.

7.

With the utmost precision, with the hard-nosed directness of a professional documentarian, Bjørneboe the inmate several months later unleashed a polemic in the form of a series of articles on the Norwegian prison system which shook the perhaps complacent faith of at least a fair number of people in their democratic institutions. The onslaught was met, however, with a telling silence by prison authorities and the State Prosecutor's office. When Bjørneboe raised the stakes by accusing specific figures in the highest echelons with being responsible for a specific death—the suicide by hanging of inmate Kjell Hanson, who medical authorities had warned could not tolerate prison confinement, but who ended his days in solitary confinement—the response was still nothing but a
deafening silence. Individual authorities had been accused personally of the highest crimes possible by a writer citing section and paragraph of the law. Yet even if there was to be no answer forthcoming from the authorities, something about the accusations struck a receptive chord in a media and a public that had rejected the earlier expose in *Under a Harder Heaven*. The documented truth, stark, bare, unadulterated by literary reflection or effect, had an impact without precedent in post-war Norway.

In prison, Bjørneboe had absorbed the stories of inmates who devoted their lives to self-destructive behavior to relieve the terror of confinement: Inmates who had cut their wrists, attempted suicide in painful ways, who had eaten objects such as light bulbs, and in one case an inmate who had burned one eye out with a bundle of matches (VEA 97). In "Disciplinary Measures in Norwegian Prisons" (1960) Bjørneboe described archaic treatments such as "lemmen" (the trap door), to which a prisoner is tied hand and foot for up to fourteen days; "kummen" (the tank), a lock-up in the prison cellar, lit day and night and sound-proofed, in which a prisoner might remain up to a month; "buret" (the cage), a sort of tiger cage, in which a prisoner was kept naked, in a room that was cool and damp; and finally "trøya" (the jacket), a straitjacket which could be tightened to the point where a prisoner was totally immobile, a state in which he might remain for months (VEA 105-13). The citizens of an advanced Scandinavian welfare state were, needless to say, shocked at this mire of cruelty in
the midst of their enlightened world. "The pure truth was enough," writes Fredrik Wandraup, describing the Norwegian reaction. "This was the stinking reality, laid out on a platter for the public. A freshly cut-off head could not have been more frightening" (89).

The prison articles were unleashed with the appearance of "The Treatment of Young Offenders" on Christmas Eve, 1959 ("Christmas comes but once a year," remarks Bjørneboe in the article [VEA 98]). Within the new year, the material coalesced into the novel The Evil Shepherd (Den Onde hyrde), written once again outside of Norway, on the volcanic island of Ischia where Ibsen wrote most of Peer Gynt before an eruption a hundred years before. The book tells the story of a youth, Tonnie, who is released from jail, but due to his background and "education" in a reformatory and prison, is turned away by family, employers, anyone who could have helped him. He goes the natural route from there: back to those who live as society's refuse in the criminal world, back to crime, back to prison, and his final destruction, since the primary problem in his story is that he is a soul that cannot stand incarceration. It is curious to note, that once the prison material becomes literature, it begins to be shaped by older literary traditions. The outline of this story is in fact an antique one from the last century, as can be seen most clearly in the later, dramatized version of the same story: Many Happy Returns (Til Lykke med dagen, 1965). The plot of the story of Tonnie seems to raise a question: Is the author using an old
British stage plot for a new social dilemma? Or is it more to the point to say that the system of justice has not gone through any essential changes since the age of English melodrama?

What emerges in Bjørneboe's concern with the conflict between authorities and youth is a prophetic pronouncement, not only with reference to the issues of alienation and revolt in the sixties ("More unconditional prison sentences cannot be used to counteract the spiritual emptiness which today's young people have inherited from the State Attorney's own generation" [VEA 96]), but also in light of the coming spate of calls for prison reform in many western countries. His concerns of the late fifties and early sixties prefigure works such as Foucault's *Surveiller et punir* (1975), which would detail the evolution of European justice from systems of torture to the prison system—-from the feudal approach of trying to work changes on the body, to the modern approach of attempting to work changes on either the soul or the behavior of an individual. As with Foucault, Bjørneboe's work with his prison material would offer insights that would contribute to his more general critique of society. Foucault will reveal how, at a certain historical juncture, philosophers and social thinkers had brought society to the point of choosing between treating offenders as "juridical subjects" or "obedient subjects." In the first case the goal would have been to create a system of crime/punishment "signs," in which all punishments would be specific and appropriate to individual crimes. This would be
the punishment of the "social pact." The latter approach, that of the obedient subject, placed priority on the obedience of the person to be corrected to some power. This was the choice that society took, according to Foucault, leading to the generalized punishment of the prison for all crimes, i.e., "forms of coercion, schemata of constraint, applied and repeated. Exercises, not signs: time-tables, compulsory movements, regular activities, solitary meditation, work in common, silence, application, respect, good habits" (Foucault 128). Foucault will point out that the foundation of such a system is a special relationship between the individual being punished, and the individual punishing him: "The agent of punishment must exercise a total power, which no third party can disturb; the individual to be corrected must be entirely enveloped in the power being exercised over him." In such a system secrecy is imperative, and there must be a discontinuity between the external legal authorities that establish guilt, and a punishment that is essentially carried out in the shadows (128-29).

Foucault's volume will appear in 1975, the year before Bjørneboe's death—fifteen years after the appearance of his prison essays, and also after the completion of his "History of Bestiality." In the early prison material, Bjørneboe does not yet prove himself to be the kind of social theorist we find in Foucault—although his analysis will come strikingly near that of Foucault's in parts of the trilogy, and in his later essays on hierarchy and authoritarianism written from the
theoretical perspective of anarchism. At the time his first works on the prisons appeared, he was more concerned with recording what he saw as being the truth, to break the myths and complacency, set the records straight and bring the dilemma out into the open. One might say that he did not at the time see himself in the role of a social theorist, as much as a kind of servant of justice.

8.

The work with the prison material marks an important turn in Bjørneboe's authorship. All the reassuring incense of metaphysical pursuits which can take a writer into spheres that hover above the human condition is blown to the winds. The plunge into social conflict and human concerns is extreme, the kind of conscious imbalance towards social concerns we have come to expect primarily from marxists. Yet the organic progression from concern with man's soul to concern with man's life poses two challenges for the writer: How to justify this split between concerns for the inner and outer aspects of life, and how to record the process in literary form. While ensconced with his wife and small daughters in a run-down house in a glade at Enebakk, the solution comes to Bjørneboe in the form of a young woman—a statue standing out below the pine-covered hills. The house looks out onto the valley and low mountains which had once been the site of one of Norway's first industrial centers, which rose, fell, and has since been
reclaimed by the forest and bush. The statue is a solitary monument to Ragnhild Jølsen, daughter of Holm Jølsen—one of the earliest industrialists in the country. It is the figure of a woman writer who died at the age of 33 of an overdose of the drug choral, and was from that moment elevated to membership in Scandinavia's pantheon of pariah writers—a particularly Nordic phenomenon. Ragnhild Jølsen's story and the story of her father's enterprise at Enebakk came to form the basis of Bjørneboe's novel The Dream and the Wheel (Drømmen og hjulet, 1964). Here was yet another story of the growth of a soul who had to resist the demands of both traditions and progress to find complete humanness. The events take place at a time when humanity in many parts of the world was being put to the test by industrialization. The Dream and the Wheel is perhaps Jøns Bjørneboe's most beautiful book, although it has never been translated into a major language. Here Bjørneboe follows the more traditional requirements that a work be whole and "beautiful." The authorial presence appears to be minimized. Clear signs of intervention by the author, often a signature of Bjørneboe fiction, fall away. The authorial presence will make itself felt in another way, however, that we shall return to later.

Ragnhild Jølsen is torn by the forces at work on her from without and within. While she is struggling against both the forces of tradition and progress—elements of the outside world that seem to want to crush the vulnerable interior world of a child—still, there are also traditions which provide her with
a sense of identity, as well as a kind of progress that provides the world around her with hope. There are attractions for her in her father's world. But this outer world more often than not clashes with her inner world, and she is caught between the dream and the wheel. While Holm Jølsen converts the once rural valley to an industry-town revolving around his match factories, an adolescent Ragnhild retreats to the forest of her ancestors, bear hunters who populated the area even before the farmers had arrived. In the forest she meets with the dark powers which nourish her imagination. As she matures, frightening erotic forces take on the forms of companions, lovers—all figures of a powerful imagination under pressure. These figures are depicted as though they were absolutely tangible, no doubts are introduced as to their reality—whether they be an incarnation of a bear hunter, or the devil himself. She makes a personal pact with all the evil she finds in the forest, flaunting the pact in the face of the structuring society around her, a society that would deny to women any experience of desire, passion or sexuality. She adopts her nickname, Hildr (close to the Norwegian word hulder, meaning fairy or wood nymph), and through the years the forest companions which have taken on life for her transform into the nuclei of her novels. Ragnhild Jølsen wrote five novels in the last five years of her life. Of the five novels she was to write, the final one, The Red Autumn (Den Røde høst) is to be something so terrifying and so true that she puts it off indefinitely. It personifies, and begins to pay her personal
visits to demand its release, but she never feels ready for it. As the time to write *The Red Autumn* approaches, and it begins taking shape in her mind, her morphine dependency increases. She dies before completing her final work.

On the one hand, the novel is a paean to the primal life within a human being. It evokes lyrically the dark gods of the woods who represent the forces of nature both without us and within us. The echoes of Knut Hamsun's *Pan* reverberate not far off. The novel has another important aspect. It is, once again, a documentary novel as well. It documents not only historical lives, but ties them all in with landmark events in the triumph of industry, science and technology, as they come to bear on Europe and the little industrializing society at Enebakk. It looks forward to other documentary novels of the sixties. It is an exemplary study of the "poetic naturalism" Bjørneboe calls for, among other places, in his essay "Literature and Reality" ("Litteratur og virkelighet," 1971). The peculiar contradiction between the poetic and the naturalistic in *The Dream and the Wheel*, the extent to which the supra-normal world is made concrete, natural, tangible, makes for a rather fantastic naturalism, in fact. There is more than this one reason why a comparison might be drawn with the later advent of the magic realism of Gabriel García Márquez. Bjørneboe's fantastic naturalism shares several other features with Márquez's novel of three years later, in which magic encounters are taken for granted, myths become real, and political realities are beyond belief: *Cien años de soledad.*
The scene and the center of *The Dream and the Wheel* is one large plot of earth. This spot on the earth is observed through the course of many decades so that Enebakk's story—like that of Marquez's Macondo, or Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha county a couple of decades earlier—is the story of the rise and fall of a little empire, a microcosm of a society undergoing transformations of gargantuan proportions. The developments traced by the narrative last one hundred years. The original title was in fact to have been "The Hundred Years" (Wandrup 100). During this time the progress of Western society makes its way to Enebakk: the introduction of electricity and the establishment of industry; the organization and administration of a company town; the great scientific discoveries which come in the form of publications like incomprehensible miracles from mainland Europe; the ideologies of the time too—socialism and pietism—with the attendant social conflicts they arouse; even a hint of the coming of the welfare state can be glimpsed when Holm Jølsen establishes a health plan for the workers. Through adversity, disasters (the plants burn down so that Jølsen must build them up again), the pressure of growing banking conglomerates, Jølsen, the man burning with a vision, for better or worse, battles on like Marquez's Colonel Buendía towards an ideal that is not always apparent to those around him.18

The power that shoved the trees into the sky, the power of the sun which drew waters toward the heavens and let it rain back down in the river, the heat of the sun which lay stored since the infancy of the earth inside petroleum, phosphorus and
sulfur, all this was now being collected in the little and harmless looking matches in the warehouse, filled with hundreds and thousands of innocent wooden sticks with golden heads. Stored there was heat and fire and explosive power like that in the sun itself. It was that same sun-power that the workers had tamed, cowed and stored in little boxes. And it would be resurrected in tiny, tiny flames which were lit all over the world. Fire and light which would bring well-being, enlightenment and happiness, in a word: salvation—the new time itself, into the town. (DOH 39)

The great events collect around the Jølsen family like filings to a magnet. A most significant development for Ragnhild is the processing of morphine—the damper of physical pain, as well as the pain of a mind which is incapable of separating itself from the suffering around it. It is after Ragnhild's stay in Italy, where she makes a pilgrimage into the areas of raw misery which scarred that transforming country, that her affair with morphine becomes a relationship of dependency. Both her social concerns and her use of morphine were scandalous things for women of good society. Already as an adolescent, Ragnhild was acutely aware that the world deemed it a good thing that those aspects of life which create full human beings should be suppressed: they are things that are evil. For the young, willful Ragnhild, the only logical response had been to decide she must embrace evil. Edvard Munch's painting "Pubertêt" via the young Ragnhild Jølsen via Jens Bjørneboe looks like this:

He had painted a picture of a little witch, a tiny little witch. It was a split naked witch, who had not yet been on Bloksberg. She was sitting naked at the edge of the bed with her hands pressed down between her thin thighs, while she stared straight forward, and while her shadow stood on the wall
behind the bed like the image of something that women don't have. The picture was called "Puberty," but that was not the right name for it; because it was a witch. And she would be burned....

This evening she would spit on the Bible again ... (107)

As a mature artist, Ragnhild's style is maligned for being "unfeminine". Now practiced at ignoring society's sense of propriety, she is still genuinely surprised at the assumptions made by mass culture. ("Was it the case that there really should be one art for men and another kind of art for women?--Was it the case that there should be one kind of love for men and another kind of love for women?") She has purposely created a style that is "scant and hard and without lacework and flourishes," and though this might have been uncommon among women, "it was not particularly widespread among men either! The most of them were openly writing like little girls knit" (155).

These thoughts, though cast in a special light coming from a woman of those times, come close to Bjørneboe's own thoughts on style. Bjørneboe is revealing an affinity for his subject as a writer. The identification between author and subject was in fact much closer than readers of the novel would have known at the time of its publication. Ragnhild faces up to the necessity of finally writing the last, fearful book, The Red Autumn --which makes its visitations to her in the form of a kind of double. Her first insight before starting into The Red Autumn is that of the double-ness of existence: "behind the mask was not just a face, but the opposite face." Everything
contains its own opposite, so that "the deeper one got into the forces of life, the stronger and more frightening the contradictions became." Perhaps the greatest contradiction is Death/Eros, or Satan/Eros, the elements of which are combined in the Hindu god Shiva, the god of destruction and fertility. "The Christians have simply forgotten the origins of their own beliefs: Death and rebirth, crucifixion and resurrection. No one can live without dying first" (179). This thought, present in Bjørneboe's earliest poetry, has now been redeployed. It will provide the seeds for his trilogy, as well. Death awareness must come before consciousness of our own freedom. Death must be embraced before one can live.

A male author, here writing about a woman, in this case apparently taking a stance of distance through his third person/omniscient narrative, is in fact showing signs of a strong process of identification with his subject--an author whose very femaleness seems to be an essential component of what it takes to be able to receive the world openly. The final chapters bring Bjørneboe up to the point where his History of Bestiality could begin. Here lies the convergence between the writer and his subject in the narrative. Two authors: together they discover a new lens with which to see the world, "which needs no colored glass--Death." Ragnhild prepares to face The Red Autumn:

The book was a contemporary novel, and she cared so little now about the world and people that she could use life as it was without great revisions--her own fate, without masking it--because everything outside of the truth was unimportant.
What she was in the process of doing was to hold the great clearance sale of all that was hers, to put her life on the butcher table, just as one could see entire animal carcasses lying carved up on display on marble counters at the butcher shops in Rome. It was more than nakedness, more than unchasteness; it was to pull the skin off of reality, to cut the whole thing up with viscera, blood and nerves. (200)

The last chapter, "The Sundial," serves as an epilogue after Ragnhild's death. It takes Enebakk up to the new age when a group of scientists "make a war weapon of two heavy metals, of uranium and plutonium" (204). This new age is also the point of departure for most all the thought to be found in *Moment of Freedom*. Meanwhile, Ragnhild Jølsen has returned to the woods with the forest-men of her childhood, and the industrial society at Enebakk is eclipsed and overgrown once again with forest. It is finished. For Jens Bjørneboe though, the book has another conclusion. It is to be found in the note that Ragnhild Jølsen wrote to herself before confronting *The Red Autumn*: "Now your life's work shall begin" (201).

9.
There was to be one slight interval before that difficult phase was entered. At the end of 1965, before setting to work on *Moment of Freedom*, Bjørneboe rapidly completed a project of which no one, including his own family and closest friends, was aware. Therefore, not one of them expected that anything untoward was in store when, on the 8th of October 1966, a bold ad appeared in several Norwegian papers announcing publication
of "The first Norwegian erotic novel, Without a Stitch (Uten en tråd) ... by a well-known Norwegian author." On the 11th of October 1966, the police raided all book dealers selling the book. By June of 1967, Jens Bjørneboe would be sitting out a several month long obscenity trial in Oslo Municipal Court—a trial that has now entered Norwegian literary history. The banning of the book, and the trials which ensued resulted in a massive upsurge of translations and sales immediately in Denmark and Sweden, later in Germany, Italy the U.S. and Japan (not to mention, eventually, a Danish film, suitable for certain Danish adult cinemas and New York's 42nd Street theaters—but not much else). Yet the authorities in Norway tightened their grip on the book all the more during all of this—and the grip has remained tight until this day. As of this writing it cannot be bought or sold in Norway, and the Norwegian language edition cannot be procured at the main university library in Oslo, where it is stored in a safe.²⁰

Without a Stitch is the story of the coming-out of an eighteen year-old named Lillian, who is unable to experience orgasm. Her sexual odyssey begins with the treatment she undergoes with a specialist in orgasm by the name of Dr Peterson. Aside from the physical techniques of Dr Peterson's therapeutic regime—he can only help so far, and then must send a patient out into the world—there is his essential teaching, printed as the foreword to the book:

People use the term "sexual morality", but it's a mistaken expression. There is no particular sexual morality. Whatever
you might do with yourself—whether you sleep with girls or boys—or whatever in the world you might find yourself doing with them or yourself; in that regard there is no other morality than that which holds for all aspects of living: honesty, courage and consideration. As in all other relations, the only thing that matters in sexual life is that it's wrong to harm others. That is the only sexual morality there is. You shall not use your sexuality to achieve power or influence over others, you shall not hurt them or cause them unnecessary pain. (UT 1)

Lillian progresses from innocent experiments and games with friends in her own surroundings, to more adventurous, colorful and acrobatic—to the point of being hard to visualize—sexual encounters in a variety of locales and countries. Aside from one sado-masochistic whipping scene with a German entrepreneur, it most often depicts sexual happenings, heterosexual or homosexual, that are enjoyable, successful, without negative consequences. It is this fact, perhaps, that deprives the narrative of tension, and raises the question as to whether entertaining "innocent" pornography is a contradiction in terms, or whether it is even possible. It is written in Bjørneboe's customary clear, precise Norwegian, and is totally lacking in the puerile terms of abuse and passion, the outpouring of taboo words, typical of the genre.21 There is very little character development, the emphasis is on developments. It is linear, descriptive and flat. In contrast to an aspect of "holiness" which is strong in other Bjørneboe works prior to these, the tone has changed and there is no holy cow which cannot be debunked. Only when Lillian stops in a book store to buy copies of Novalis, Hölderlin, Strindberg and H.C. Andersen during her travels do we find anything sacred
enough to be paid tribute to. Fredrik Wandrup describes the novel as brimming "full of joie de vivre and humor, just the thought of forbidding such a book is hysterical quite beyond the norm" (111). Bjørneboe himself stated in an interview, "I wrote it in four days, and I wrote it with pleasure—it costs me nothing to confess that" (110).

More important than the book itself, however, was the sequence of events which the book set off, and its impact, not only on further works by Jens Bjørneboe, but on Norwegian society. Two other books were generated almost immediately by the trial itself: a collection of essays by Bjørneboe and other authors on free speech and attitudes toward sexuality and arts, *A Thread (En Tråd)*, and the volume, *The Without A Stitch Trial (Saken om Uten en tråd)*, which offered an edited record of the trial with summaries and commentaries by three writers, dispatched by Bjørneboe's other publisher Pax to cover the event. If one were to include legal proceedings against authors among their collected works, and perhaps one should, the total material generated by *Without a Stitch* of cultural value takes us far beyond the slim, or let it be said, negligible contribution of this book's 200 pages themselves.

It should be remembered that this is not an isolated case, but part of a growing pattern in which the discourse contained between the covers of a work by Bjørneboe turns out not to be a closed system, but a "system" which interacts with society—as was the case with works like Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, or...
Strindberg's *Getting Married* (a book which earned its author, too, both a prolonged trial and a reputation for indecency). The events in the courtroom during the *Without a Stitch* trial resemble that of a classic comedy—say, Commedia dell'Arte, or the comedies of Molière—in which old and stiffened social mores are made to bend by the health-nurturing powers of laughter. Bjørneboe, exploiting his "bad-boy" image, is described in the accounts as though he were playing a kind of Harlequino to State Prosecutor Dorenfeldt's Pantalone—Dorenfeldt being fated to play the role of Bjørneboe's antagonist in fights involving the justice system, past and future. The Scandinavian tradition of passing obscenity judgments against some of the most important authors is dredged up during the proceedings. Prominent among these authors are Strindberg in Sweden, and Hans Jaeger, the Kristiania anarchist who had been imprisoned for his novel *Fra Kristiania Bohømen* in the last century. More to the point was the case of Agnar Mykle, whose *Song of the Red Ruby* (*Sangen om den røde rubin*) was banned in Norway in 1956, the same year as Henry Miller's *Sexus* was banned there. Bjørneboe had early on taken it upon himself to defend Mykle—a writer who took the authorities' interventions with his work more seriously, who was less prepared for a fight, and so far more hurt by his own trial a decade earlier than Bjørneboe was by his. In an "Open letter to the Director of Public Prosecutions" (*Aftenposten*, 1957), Bjørneboe had accused the authorities of trying to crush Mykle by taking him to court, and by imposing an enormous fine,
due to political motives. "Agnar Mykle," he wrote at the time of Mykle's trial, "is today an apostate socialist, and he has not hidden his apostacy. The Song of the Red Ruby can also be read as a political novel. It deals with a young man's path out of the Labor Party" (NMN 60-61). In another piece in Dagbladet he suggests that the authorities' accusations in the press that Mykle had invaded the privacy of Labor Party figures whom he used as models for characters, should have nothing to do with the obscenity charges they were supposed to be pressing (NMN 62-66).

Bjørneboe's trial became a forum on the relation between art and society. As the best judges of art, the critics were of use to the prosecution in the courtroom. Professor Willy Dahl's evaluation of Without a Stitch, most likely to his chagrin, was entered as evidence. It must certainly have been an awkward incident for this literary progressive, who always approached Bjørneboe's work with a certain scepticism--all the more so in this case--and who was in every respect opposed to the banning. Among the critical passages by the extremely influential Dahl entered in the record was the following:

The book has no emotional range, only two feelings: sexual anxiety and the pleasure of love-making. It is one-sidedly didactic ... and it is at the same time a monomaniac appeal to very few of my feelings. It is psychologically incomplete ... it does not equip the protagonist with any story, environment ... any dimension other than the sexual.... It is smoothly and competently written by a man who knows his craft, but the style exudes the routine ... sex organs are discussed without variation as "flower" and "shaft", and one does wonder what a flower has to do with a shaft.... (Såken om "Uten en tråd" [145]
The position of the different sides in the courtroom was clarified in an instant when State Prosecutor Dorenfeldt concluded: "It was established in both the Miller and the Mykle cases that in our land it is, in the last instance, the courts which shall decide a book's literary merits. It is the justice system which, on the basis of evidence, shall decide this question." The judge himself concluded that, despite the fact that the book represented a certain improvement over the usual pornography available in the mass market, "The book is obscene. It cannot be evaluated as being of high literary value. Its value for illumination, rather, is less than null. Its message is sexual nihilism in novel-sauce" (Wandrup 117).

For Bjørneboe, the trials--both the initial trial and the appeal--did have their positive side. Aside from providing the public with another probing look at the justice system, he earned enough from foreign sales to buy his family a house in Billingstad, pay it off, and put away some savings for the first time. He also concluded in a letter to the Swedish actor Allan Edwall (8 May 1967), that for a writer, going through a trial had some benefits:

I am a bit worried by the trial that's coming up ... the authorities are preparing an execution and not a trial. But it has its bright side: for a dramatist there is always something purely technical and dramaturgical to learn from a trial. The trial, the procedure, it's the primal pattern of a play. All trials are playable dramas, and all plays are spiritually speaking trials, a struggle and a disclosure of truth.
A sequel to *Without a Stitch* was published in Denmark: *Uten en Traevl II* (1968). It is a more satiric variant of pornography, targeting various pillars of society, containing as well indecent comic caricature drawings by Bjørneboe of different civil authorities caught with their pants down.

Yet with the trial and the appeal dragging on for months, despite the courtrooms filled to overflowing, Bjørneboe surely experienced the ultimate solitude of anyone who is in the position of being "the accused." All the more so with official social forces pitting their prestige on showing one man to be a moral monstrosity—for reasons that can never be proven, but which can be suspected. There must have been some kind of lasting and personal impact. On the one hand he had proven all that he had wanted to prove. On the other, he would have to live with an official label of pariah from this point onward.

10.

The assault on social institutions represented by the prison material, and the assault on him by social institutions most clearly represented by the banning of his book, set Bjørneboe up to be either a national celebrity or a pariah—or both. The route of the celebrity, an obvious one for, say, an aspiring politician, was not a route open to a mind inclined as Bjørneboe's against ideology and towards a constant inward self-examination.

This in no way implies that his preoccupations were always
dark and his attitude morose. He had always struck a balance between the solemnity of truth and the laughter he associated with insight. While Bjørneboe was immersed in the prison material, he was writing essays on travel, cuisine, and one of his favorite topics of all—cats. A prime example is his essay from 1961, "On a Cat from Naples" ("Om en katt fra Napoli" [POA 121-28]), which is a mischievous but loving paean to a personality—a cat's personality—that defied everyone's expectations and bowed to no rules of common decency. Even after the *Without a Stitch* trial his acid sense for the comic is strong as ever. There is every indication, nevertheless, that the long-range effects of more than a solid decade of controversy left its mark on Bjørneboe's Weltanshauung and his attitude as an author. In fact, a person so emotionally vulnerable could not have weathered the assaults—which he, curiously, often brought upon himself—without going through some kind of metamorphosis. Months before the trial of *Without a Stitch* began, he had completed *Moment of Freedom*, the first volume of what was to be his trilogy. Ragnhild Jølsen had prepared to meet the work she was never fully ready to write with the words "Now your life's work shall begin," and Bjørneboe in fact then began the History of Bestiality—a somewhat flexible heading which he will also later imply covers all his works of fiction up to and including the trilogy. A man who becomes "the accused" knows what the meeting with the world is like.

When Duke Hans, sees the young monk beneath his sickroom
in the Czar's courtyard, waiting to be broken on the wheel, he first thinks he sees in his face that of his friend, the Spanish commander Spinola. After begging, seemingly irrationally, the Czar's clemency for that one little monk, he realizes that he has lied to the Czar, for "despite his powerful likeness to Spinola it was more he himself the monk had reminded him of ..." (HH 103). And so, on the day of his death, the monk comes to his room, though unable to communicate in any language with the dying duke. They meet, even kiss, and the monk says a prayer for his double. The novel here turns from its theme of "a mind's meeting with the world" to another: "mankind's meeting with itself." This double that is so strange, so hard to understand, so distant proves to be, paradoxically, oneself, and the source of one's compassion.

The trilogy picks up where, many years before, Jens Bjørneboe's first literary effort left off.
THREE / THE HISTORY OF BESTIALITY

1. At the heart of Bjørneboe's work lies his novel trilogy known as the "History of Bestiality", and it is with the first volume of the group, The Moment of Freedom (Frihetens øyeblikk, 1966), that he breaks into a new mode of fiction which challenged all the norms with which he had been working in his prior novels. Terms having to do with the ritual of the courtroom like "justice," "trial," "judgment," "guilt," "protocol," "evidence," would begin to take on new meaning in Bjørneboe's metaphysical lexicon. Certainly one of the influences here is Saint John's book of Revelation, which is said to have been his favorite book of the Bible (Wandrup 41). Undoubtedly, Kafka's The Trial represents an important precedent in describing the trial of an individual existence. Before Bjørneboe's own and very literal obscenity trial took place, Moment of Freedom.
was already on the shelves. It was to be the first volume of the History of Bestiality, which also comprises *The Powderhouse: La Poudrière* (Krutåtnet, 1970) and *The Silence* (Stillheten, 1973).\(^1\) *Moment of Freedom*, which bears the subtitle "The Heiligenberg Manuscript" is divided into three distinct sections, the first of which is "The Cities."

2.

High in the Alps, in a German principality called Heiligenberg, which will not be found on any map, the narrator is daily fulfilling his obligations in the courtroom as a Servant of Justice—a term which in the Norwegian, has both an allegorical and a more mundane meaning: "Rettstjener"=court official. His official obligations include keeping papers in order, cleaning, and keeping the court records or protocols. Aside from his official duties, however, the Servant of Justice has been keeping his own set of parallel records, a long and detailed account of man's cruelty to man encompassing twelve volumes and which he calls his History of Bestiality. He explains in the opening passages that he had been many years traveling in the "land of Chaos," but since he has come to stay in Heiligenberg, the opportunity to be in a place where he could witness the work of "day to day justice--or better: day to day injustice" has brought
him strength, and has brought order to his life (FO 7-8). He adds that his "ability to tolerate injustice—not just my own, but the injustices done to others—has transformed in the course of these years to an incredible force. Of course, this only happened because I hadn't for one minute lost the ability to suffer at the sight of this injustice which permeates everything." He has the most insignificant position in the courtroom, since he is there as neither judge, jury, nor prosecution nor defense counsel—"not even as the accused" (8).

He describes the local population as people who "can hardly be said to be filled with the Holy Ghost." He does not describe, yet, what this Holy Ghost might signify, but offers a sort of negative explanation. "They are people without song, without folklore, music, dance." Even so, it must be said that they can think. "You can see it in their eyes. They are calculating. They are adding or subtracting in their heads" (9). He comes upon the word "lemurian" to describe them. This term comes from Rudolph Steiner's Anthroposophy, though the connection is not made in the text itself. It denotes a time in human history before consciousness made it possible for human beings to mark themselves off from animals. The inhabitants of the town read bankbooks, and if necessary, their laws—in order to discover what they are allowed to do to their neighbors. Everyone is in conflict with everybody, but in some strange way they still manage to stick together. It
is a "lemurian" concord. They are marvelous skiers, and in the winter they go to the tops of the mountains and down to the valleys "over and over again." The Servant of Justice is himself exploited, as if by a breed of economic vampires. They are always finding ways to get more rent out of his poverty-level wages. He is cheated on food prices, electricity, and they double his income on paper before they tax it. They are in every way unfair. The goal is obviously to enrich oneself at the expense of others. At times, they kill people in painful ways, "just to amuse themselves and pass the time. But their own courts aquit them" (10).

The Servant explains that, although the system of justice ("rett" or "right") has now given him a kind of scheme or map with which he can make sense of the world, and especially the "land of Chaos" where he has wandered for forty years, it is a pyrrhic victory. For in fact, he cannot remember his own name—"an aftereffect of my long wandering years" he suggests: a period of forty years which is, of course, also the length of the wandering of the Children of Israel. Nevertheless, he has a name that he is known by in the surrounding valley. It is a negative, deprecating name. He is now forty-six years old, his beard is growing white, and he senses he is about to come face to face with something that will be decisive for him. He recalls that when Socrates was facing death, and was given the choice to lie or flee, he had answered: "No
... I can't. A man of my age, and with such a well-known name?" (11). Like Socrates, he is ripe for his own moment of truth ("sannhetens øyeblikk"). Up until now he has been willing to accept a world which he says is populated with "little bears" ("småbjørn"), as he calls his fellow creatures. Aside from the little bears, he cites another group, which he calls "the scholastics," who also belong to the family "homo consumens." A third, possibly less dangerous group, he calls the "escatologists" (14).

The population of little bears in Heiligenberg is made up of essentially good citizens. But when the Foehn wind blows over the Mediterranean from the North African desert, there are outbursts of cruelty and violence almost beyond description. Normal and well-regarded citizens can open fire on each other, attack each other, hunt each other down. Even so, many—such as the butcher who slaughtered his family and prepared them on meat hooks—can eventually find themselves back at work and as sociable as ever. Besides the Foehn wind, there is another trigger for these spasms of chaos in the area. The local cider, if consumed without caution, leads to a special type of intoxication which can unleash the worst in the little bears. (This applies occasionally to Kirsch as well, but never white wine.) The Servant, however, has his methods for escaping both the harsh reality of the town, and the customary injustice of the courtroom. He retreats to his tavern, "Zum Henkern," where he imbibes red wine and indulges in
speculative dialogues with his drinking partners the Bell Ringer and the Sexton. Kirsch in particular leads to the most abstract exercises in logic—for example their dispute on the origins of consciousness. The Bell Ringer, who believes in the law of causality, achieves something of a victory over the Servant of Justice in the debate. The Servant argues that consciousness must come of matter, originally, like energy. The Bell Ringer gets the final word:

When you observe consciousness, then you have proof only of consciousness—and when you observe energy, then you have proved only the existence of energy. That's all there is to it. Otherwise you believe in miracles: that is to say, a violation in the law of causality. (42)

This is an uncommon argument for a man of the spirit to be using against a materialist theory of the origins of consciousness. He uses not theology but positivism. Curiously, it is an argument in favor of the autonomy of consciousness. In the debate, no one has been asked to "believe" in anything, let alone begin by positing the existence of God. Yet this argument, early on in the narrative, will prove to be vital to the proposition underlying the whole book. The autonomy of consciousness is a prerequisite for any meaningful definition of freedom. The dialogues in Zum Henkern are not meaningless bar harangues included for the sake of a satire of types. The narrator at the point where we meet him is a person on
the verge of a definitive break with the inherited values of the world around him. The precipitating event is not long in coming.

One day he notices that the judge's attention is not on the proceedings in the courtroom, despite the severe punishments that are to be handed out. The judge's attention is instead focused on something between the pages of his volume of court records (43). After work hours, upon inspection, the Servant discovers that the source of the judge's distraction is a collection of photos. They show many of the town's most prominent citizens engaged in explicit sexual poses with animals, children and each other. The narrator describes the moment as "painful," for he had taken the morality of these citizens as a given, whether or not he shared their views:

Having served many years as a servant of justice, obviously I should not be amazed by anything, and as a traveler, sailor and singer in my younger years, I should be familiar with anything that is human. But one has to understand the situation in the alpine town in order to understand my horror. The city is Calvinistic, and severe to the extreme in its moral code. (46)

From this we can see that if the narrator is intended to be in search of a moral vision, it will not come out of what we commonly call morality. After this discovery, it is clear that any moral vision of the world will have to dispense with the easy hypocrisy of the moralistic.

Despite the claims of at least one critic that the Servant
of Justice proves to have his own moral vision to juxtapose to this moralism, if we comb the length and breadth of the book we will find little to substantiate this. In the first segment of the book at least it remains a completely open question as to what a moral vision is supposed to be, and who will define it. It will remain a dominant question—and an open one—through to the end of the book.

Meanwhile, the crisis described as the "moment of truth" has been set off in the narrator. There is no turning back. He can no longer believe that "the world is right" and he is wrong. He is alone with truth and its attendant darkness. He will echo several times the words of a man he refers to as the crucified "Rabbi Joschua ben Joseff": a twist which is typical of Bjørneboe's bent for de-familiarizing Christianity, to get us to reevaluate the symbols and values we have inherited in the West without being conscious of it. The "Rabbi's" famous words: "The truth shall make you free." Yet there is a truth he is not confronting--this peculiar narrator who claims to be writing his life as we are reading. The evidence is, as he confesses, that his memory is perforated with many "raw holes." He has even forgotten his own name and all that happened to him in his years of wandering. If he can find his suppressed past, and recall his name, he will stand at the cross-roads to freedom:

Without memory, no continuity, no reality, no perspective over my life, no I am. I lie in sweat and darkness, half
awake, and in fever and dreams, surrounded by scraps of pictures that were once whole. I cannot describe how I am fighting to get my consciousness back, to avoid going under and finding myself among the little bears. (34)

He begins by recollecting his childhood. His father was a correct man, full of a suppressed lust for life: a suffering capitalist. "Each time I see a businessman, my heart flows over with sympathy and compassion ... I become a heartfelt anarcho-communist every time I look a businessman in the eye. For I know of his deep despair, his suspicion that he has built his life on sand" (25). His memories of his father lead him also to childhood memories of the land he refers to alternately as "Germania" and "Teutonia" before the Second World War. Here is unleashed a pent up arsenal of poetic and polemical weaponry against the great culture of Europe which carried the seeds of a world war and a holocaust within it. He calls the currency reform which helped make West Germany a model of economic stability after the war the end of hope for Germany. "The moment the first new mark was printed, that same second, Germany won the Third World War" (33). East Germany is seen as Germany's bad conscience: "A place where no German can sell pornography, buy stocks, speculate in property, earn money on Verdun, sell his grandmother." There one is forced to be poor--to do penance. "After death, Germans go to DDR" (36). What these passages constitute is the opening to the narrator's symbiotic relationship with German culture, a relationship which is
paradoxical in the extreme—a love-hate dependency—and not, as one major critic has suggested, a kind of racial attack in which the author has inadvertently undermined his own intentions. What is not yet obvious at this early stage is that the Servant of Justice, as is the case with Bjørneboe himself, is writing from inside of that culture. The narrator is not an outsider, or at least not in the sense that we have come to use that term since existentialism. In geographical terms, Heiligenberg is German, even if it is also a kind of allegorical hell or limbo. So he places himself in "Germania" geographically. What is more, he has studied Germany thoroughly, is fluent in the tongue, knows the literature ("I am allowed all this, because no one has loved Germania as I have. No one loves it as I still love it" [36]).

The tirade leads him back on a thread of emotion to the memories he must come to terms with. It provides him with an opening. The memories of the war and its atrocities bring him to the conclusion that the world is sick. But the world says that those who can not fit into it are the ones who are sick (37). The narrator in this connection introduces the subject of syphilis. That the disease signifies a great deal more than the physical malady here, is immediatly clear. Curiously, Bjørneboe will be using the term throughout the novel and the trilogy as well as an emblem for both the diseased society, and the "sickness" which sets apart creative individuals from the
norms which that society calls healthy. The author seems to want it both ways. The contradiction in the use of the metaphor might possibly make a reader feel he is grasping at straws as he tries to pin down the connotations of syphilis in Bjørneboe's work. We shall return to this in looking at volume three of the trilogy. It can be asserted that, by and large, in Moment of Freedom, syphilis is used as an emblem for the thing which provides for difference in the individual. It is associated with genius and freedom. It stands for all that societies deem sick in their problem children—the outsiders. Bjørneboe finds reasons for solidarity with all of Europe's heretics and their dis-ease. Here it is the Servant speaking, but Bjørneboe has echoed the same thought in his essays and plays:

Broadly speaking, what would have become of our beloved, stinking beautiful Europe without our addicts, drunks, homosexuals, consumptives, insane, syphilitics, bed-wetters, criminals and epileptics? All our culture has been shaped by criminals, madmen and patients. There is not one normal person that has done a useful or lasting thing: It was normal people who built the slave labor camps both in Germany and in Russia. I know what I'm talking about. To search for meaning in the lemurian chaos is like searching for a needle in a haystack. (37)

There is another thing about Europe's traditional terminal disease which underscores its importance as an emblem. This is the consciousness of death ("dødsbevissthet") that it brings with it, in an increasingly death-denying culture. The close relation
between truth and death is brought to our attention in the first few pages of Moment of Freedom. A lie, for example, can be corrected by yet another lie, and so on. It will never be final or absolute. "But truth--once it is first disclosed, becomes inevitable--a brother of death" (12).

Bjørneboe's use of the term "the Holy Ghost" ("Den Hellige Ånd") refers to the spirit in those who have the ability to look death in the face, as it were (15). "The moment of truth" echoes the Spanish bullfighting term "el momento de la verdad." It is the moment when the glimpse of the raised sword "exposes the true character of the struggle," one of life and death. Implied in these passages is an interpretation of the origins of all ritual. The phenomenon is also the raison d'être of all forms of theater: stage plays, wrestling, debate, and the "ritual struggle between ice-cold specialists in the courtroom":

Without the fight there is no theater.... In the trial in all its forms: farce, comedy, drama, tragedy--and in such sub-species of Justice as the operetta, opera and musical comedy, the main theme is the same: someone shall win and someone shall die. (18)

This idea that violence, and a ritual of sacrifice lying at the foundations of almost all human culture, foreshadows the work of René Girard, which has become increasingly familiar in the '70s and '80s.5

A glimpse into the truth, of finality--el momento de la verdad--is a prerequisite to the moment of freedom. It
The echoes that formulation of Rabbi Joschua ben Joseff: "The truth shall make you free." Freedom is the only thing more frightening than truth. Humanity has become conscious that it has freedom, but unfortunately without "complete consciousness of death." (16)

An ongoing concern in *Moment of Freedom*, and in Bjørneboe's work in general, is that after Auschwitz and after Hiroshima, the West had an opportunity for a historical change in consciousness which was missed. We looked away instead of looking into the truth. True freedom may only be tolerated by human beings by "grace of the Holy Ghost," and if this is lacking, mankind's awareness of its own freedom becomes a dubious gift. It came too soon, before death-consciousness, "so that the little bears in fact discovered that they, unpunished, could do whatever they pleased" (155). So it is an illusory and dangerous freedom the little bears have. In practice it becomes only the freedom to buy, sell and chase after power. In the post-nuclear age the consequences of this development could prove, to say the least, disastrous.

This problem— that the moment of freedom has come for us before the moment of truth— has been perceived by other commentators as the moral foundation of the book. Yet it is not that easy. It is not meant as either an argument against humanism and human freedom, nor is it advocacy of moralism. It is this which marks it off, however, from the existentialist concept of freedom, most notably that of
Sartre, with whom the thought expounded in the novel seems to have much in common. We have jumped ahead here because initially the concepts of the moment of truth and the moment of freedom tend to be blurred. They seem to be events which are taking place constantly, before each other and after each other. A reader will have trouble following the developments in this new sort of Bildungsroman, until he begins to understand that these are not "moments" which occur in our familiar linear time. The moment of freedom is a process. It is a moment which takes place in the "here" that is all places and the "now" that is all times (178).

The section titled "The Cities" culminates in a description of the years during which the narrator lived in exile in Stockholm. Now begins an episode that has clear parallels in the author Björneboe's own life: he had lived in Stockholm during those same years, and studied painting under the same teacher as his narrator. Once again Björneboe, much like Strindberg in his novels, manipulates the authorial presence in the text by blatantly using autobiography as material.

It is in Stockholm that he finds the identifying symptoms of the "sickness" which pervades society and which has, logically, infected him. He studies art, paints, and indulges especially his interest in medieval art. He lives in a household full of exiles and refugees in Sweden, while the war rages outside its borders. In the third section of
the book titled "Lemuria," he will look back on this time, diagnosing it as the source of his bad conscience. Later he will describe the impact it had, when, during the final moments of the world war, two cities are almost instantly wiped out by new technology:

But my own life in Stockholm was not particularly affected by this. By and large, I was strongly interested in Byzantine painting that summer. In August came the great change. The planets Uranus and Pluto stood in conjunction with the sign of Scorpio, and I decided that it no longer concerned me what the little bears did to one another. In my defense it must be said that it was to be several years before we got correct information about what happened... But the truth is, also, that nothing whatsoever happened in me. The truth is also that the American censorship was effective. The truth is also that we were tired, tired as people are after wars—we were so tired of it, that we quite simply didn't give a shit about what happened in Japan. As a Servant of Justice I would like to repeat and underscore the point that I couldn't be bothered to hear anything about it. Total peace ruled now, not the least in those two cities. In the meantime the act was carried out, and many people understood that from now on the little bears had entirely new and unheard-of possibilities to hurt each other; no amount of destruction was impossible any longer: The Moment of Freedom had arrived. (155)

Nevertheless, something had been at work on him during the Stockholm years. This is revealed in the book's first section through the vignettes he writes of the residents in the house of exiles. The first is the story of Otto who came over the sea in a small boat from Estonia, a man who keeps to himself. It turns out, in fact, that he is an SS man, in flight from the Red Army. His loyalty to his
origins, his class of industrious businessmen, put him out of favor when the first Communist government had come to power, and Otto's graphic account of the atrocities which ensued are duly recorded in the vignette. Then he describes the arrival of the Germans as that of liberators, "like God's angels." He now describes in equally graphic terms the massacres of Communists, sympathizers and Jews in which he took part before he joined the Waffen SS. "They're all dead now, hundreds of thousands, none are alive" (67). These latter events make perfect sense to him. He fled upon the arrival of the Red Army. Otto's descriptions of repression and cruelty are equally candid and credible in both cases. It is his attitude towards them that is different. This is because "the Communists don't recognize the faith" (64). That is, of course, his faith. Otto's case is simple. He is a true believer—as were his enemies. He doesn't think for himself, but only as part of a group. One side's barbarism is evil. His side's barbarism is holy. This is perhaps the most extreme practical consequence of Sartre's "mauvaise foi."

The second vignette presents a more complex case. It is the story of a German Jewish physician, the refugee Maria Rosenbaum. She is a dedicated Communist, loyal to her cause but aloof from the others in the house. She maintains an air of superiority which the narrator apprehends as "the German intellectual's grandiose arrogance" (81). Her brothers and husband had fled to
Russia. The narrator, to his dismay, hears her one day refer to them all as traitors. "Traitor" was of course a free-floating word during those years, and he must pursue the subject to understand what she means by it. To his further dismay he finds they have long since been jailed in Russia, and two of them delivered to the Gestapo by the Soviet authorities. She believes in these authorities like nothing else, and so declares her whole family "traitors to the Party" as spies and saboteurs (86). Earlier, he has recounted an incident in which he found her in a crisis of despair, as the first reports of the allied bombardment of German cities appear in the papers. She breaks down in complete hysteria, and must be comforted and put to bed, where she loses all control, and amidst her tears says: "We're losing the war--this time too!" The puzzle of Maria Rosenbaum cannot be explained away by a sigh at the irrationality of humankind. What are we to make of all these absolutely contradictory loyalties in one person: a good Communist and a good German at the same time while both sides have oppressed her and left her life in ruins? The fact is that she is not ruled by contradictory loyalties at all. There is only one principle at work here, not several: authority. Thus, there is only one loyalty. True to his character, the Servant does not elucidate the meaning of this, but Bjørneboe in his essay on the obedient "Guardian-type" ("Formyndermennesket") outlined just this personality type: those who are at
peace with life only when they are being kicked from above and can kick those below. They are the most loyal people in the world. They have "the faith," as Otto put it. The Servant confesses the hatred which came over him towards Maria Rosenbaum—for her need to submit, to kneel. However--"That means that at that time I already had a foreboding of my own sickness ... the process was underway" (88).

3.
The second section, "The Praiano Papers" is supposed to have been written, we are told, ten years earlier than the period in which "The Cities" is written. It is now being recorded once again--entered into the protocols by the Servant of Justice. The city he describes is a red city, with several gates, and it does not appear to have undergone changes since the Middle Ages. He says he knew the town before he ever got there from his dreams as a child (91). "Remembering forward," it turns out, is a talent which this narrator will demonstrate on several occasions. By his locating this geographical city in his childhood, he appears to be bringing together his own childhood and the childhood of modern European civilization at the same time. That civilization, we should remember, was born out of years of rampaging sickness: the plague. As the narrator roams the town, he comes across a
quarantined zone, marked by a sign with a Latin word he
doesn't understand "Ixo ...." Although supposedly written
ten years before "The Cities," these events take place well
after the Stockholm period described in the first section.
It is part of the period of his "travels in the land of
chaos." It is during his stay here in the Italian town
that he begins to shed the old skins of the sickness which
society has bequeathed him—without really acknowledging
it. In its place, in a torrent, come the symptoms of
something which society calls sick:

The condition cannot be described. I'm in blood over the
ankles, I'm awash in blood. In fact—that's the whole of
the matter. There is blood flowing from all the walls, and
it runs together on the street, in the gutter, or it just
floods along the sidewalk. Sometimes it reaches to my
knees. I know very well what this is. The light is turned
off. I am in a total, coal black cellar-darkness,
imprisoned in the color black. It is a known phenomenon.
I know both the popular and the technical terms for it—a
man of my experience and my reading! But it doesn't help
much, other than to give me the precise possibility to say
that this is a sickness—I have sickness-awareness; I can
give it a name. It's one thing to live in a world where
blood flows from the windowsills, from the mountains and
from the clouds—but it is another thing to put a little
Latin name to it. In a world of pure pain, where all
exterior impressions are like being touched at a point on
your body where the skin has been flayed off. It's a state
of complete pitch-black dark and pain—where you are held
prisoner under a dome which doesn't allow you to perceive
any other living being in the world than yourself. There
is nothing outside of me—which is Hell. (101-02)

It is a description of depression which has echoes of the
active almost violent forms of melancholia that Dante
depicts in Inferno. Also, as if emerging from Dante's
own bestiary, is the figure of the leopard which the
narrator meets in Praiano (115). It is this animal which becomes an emblem for this other sickness—this self-absorption in blood—and its concomitant alcoholism. The narrator himself describes it as sickness, but paradoxically implies that to be aware of it is a sign of health. 12

In "The Praiano Papers" the Servant also visits a more lively Italian town, a town much more a part of the mainstream of modern life. It is a former fishing village, white and clean, now enriched and corrupted by burgeoning tourism. Yet without imposing judgment, the narrator presents a basically lusty populace, at times with ironic distance and at times with warmth. There is for example the story of the father who tries to get rich by arranging to catch a wealthy tourist in the act of deflowering his daughter (after the act is completed, of course). There is also the tale of little Giovanni, a boy who becomes a barber's assistant, and whose mystifying "sickness" is eventually traced to the barber. Despite the irony of the discourse in these tales—and a structure of open farce in the first of the two—the betrayal of children is in fact the theme in these stories of the "white and clean town, where so much is lies" (133). Love and sensuality are not associated with opening up experience, but are part of doing business. All this is juxtaposed with another memory. The narrator's stay in the white town culminates in a three day binge with some drinking partners resulting
in a black-out. He comes to consciousness some time later near the sea in the presence of a woman in black who is holding a child by the hand. She throws him a customary, suggestive line. She then initiates the sudden, furious burst of love-making, while the child is seated on the one side of them, and on the other, unseen at first, lies a pile of excrement. After the violent embrace the woman takes money from him, but with indifference. It is then that he sees that the pair are not in fact poor. The implication is that the money was only a pretext, and that she was more interested "in the act than the money" (138). Consistent with the technique employed elsewhere in the novel, the narrator joins the readers in puzzling over the significance of this, and the presence of the child—or at least he appears to. In the trilogy, Bjørneboe is much more wont to leave the readers with inexplicable contradictions--knots of logic--than he was in earlier works. And here it is the strong image that counts. The act of love which takes place in between the child and the excrement is virtually portrayed as a still. It is a visual moment, as so much of the trilogy is visual in the contrasting styles of Bosch, Breughel, Cézanne and Callot: the latter two influences are acknowledged. The fact that the narrator turns round to see the same woman and child, "gracious and distinguished," approach another man in the same manner, serves to throw the reader even further off the track of the immediate, rational meaning that he might
be looking for in the image and the act.

The image which recurs most in the first book of the trilogy is the double. The narrator discovers his own double in many forms. The most realistically motivated example is when he examines his own naked body in a mirror ("I have never felt familiar with this man in the mirror"). He sees his own flesh as something which will betray him: It has desires, it is not holy, it will give in to pain. "The man in the mirror has always turned against me, and is to me completely unknown and strange.... He has no freedom" (56-57).

In "The Praiano Papers" the double establishes himself as more than a reflection: as a separate entity. "Once again I'm alone with a strange man" (102). He asserts that he has lived for decades in the same room with him, he has become a cross to bear. He is silent, answers no questions, but can summon up a superficial rapport with others easily. He watches this man "shave and wash every morning." He travels Europe with him, sleeps in his car, eats in the best hotels and uses the washrooms to bathe. "I see from his heels he uses a size 43 shoe. The same as me" (103). He does not think, but he is filled with images of memories from all over the world:

And I am beside him and will get to know him. But what do I have to do with him? A full-grown stranger who I know nothing about. I have, actually, my own, totally negative theory about him: It is very possible that he is a finished man; empty, dull and idiotic. He is most likely a cretin, a completely stupefied cretin, almost without
expression. He is strangest of all when he goes about doing little things--takes the blanket off his bed, spreads it out properly so that it lies taut, or arranges his clothing in some way. (104)

In an episode at the zoo the narrator spends a length of time observing a chimpanzee. Although he feels a kinship with the ten year old animal, as he and the wrinkled beast look each other over, he is astounded he says at its age, at all the time collected in the creature. "It is clear that it was the terrible age of the species, of the ape family, that I saw, not the individuals" (110). The ape in this episode/image provides a double, which unlike the decaying reflection in the mirror, traverses time. "Beside him, the pyramids are insignificant" (111). If the double as a general phenomenon in literature can be seen to represent an externalized self, perhaps a part disapproved of or unknown to oneself--the ape is a double who hints at the existence of a self that is not limited to one decaying body of flesh, but of a larger body which reproduces itself through time. But again, Bjørneboe builds his image without interpreting it. And once again he resolves it on a contradiction, so to speak. He undermines the solemnity of the observations by describing the contortions the chimp makes with his face, and his masturbatory gesture which reveals an aspect of him which is quite young, in fact (112).

Depression too becomes personified in the form of a
presence that is nothing other than a double. It is not experienced as something that comes from within. It meets him from outside. It resembles a beast of prey, has been noted above, "Just at the verge of taking form in flesh and blood." It also resembles a man: "I could almost call it 'him.' He sits there, when I wake up, and I know I'm not alone. There is another living being in the room" (134). The future, too, is experienced in the shape of a double. In another example of "remembering forward" he sees himself old, bent, whitehaired, staring over the pastures: "I have met myself this way several times; each time I remember forward, I meet the old man" (144). Death too, will later appear as a double.

What is the meaning of all of this doubling? It certainly exists elsewhere, in the Scriptures and many myths and tales of possession. The double has long been a device for art and teaching in religious mysticism. To begin with, a double always makes the metaphysical concrete so that it can be grappled with—as with Jacob's meeting with the "man" or "angel" in the desert. Dostoevsky's use of the double in his novel of the same name shows a kind of social self which emerges one day to begin doing combat with an ego-bound self that, with its moribund childish proclivities is, doomed to lose. A telling refrain in Bjørneboe's works is "man's meeting with himself," which in the sequences discussed here can be mistaken for confusion about one's identity: But that, it can fairly be said, is
what the doubles are about. Above all, the presence of a
double implies distance from something painful or
destructive. It is a necessary distance—for vision and
for survival. Bjørneboe adopts the position that Western
culture as we know it was born in Tuscany, of a people who
were famed and feared for their laughter—even laughter at
cruelty (116). Such people learn to look at the world
coolly enough to learn from it. Aretino went so far as to
laugh himself to death when he found his sister in a
bordello. "Laughter means distance" writes Bjørneboe, a
remark which could come straight out of Bergson's essay on
laughter. But the flip side of the proposition here is:
"where laughter is lacking, insanity begins." In this
sense the double, as a form of experience, is seen as a
positive force. It implies consciousness. The fact is,
when laughter disappears, so does the double. The narrator
has noted "as soon as laughter stops, that the distance is
gone"—and he can mark the precise second—"I become
unwittingly identical with myself, a condition that is
totally un-free" (117). The double is to man's encounter
with himself as laughter is to his encounter with the
world. The hypothesis which seems to emerge from this,
vis-à-vis this confrontation with self, might run as
follows: If the double=distance, and distance=freedom, then
the double=freedom.

There is a further twist to come in this logic. If
people suffer only within themselves, sickness will set
in. But **compassion** is to "suffer with." The Norwegian word "med-lidenhet" breaks down the same way as the English term, but as it is not a Latin cognate but is constructed of the two Norwegian signifying units, "with-suffering," in modern Norwegian the meaning is--one might say--closer to the surface than the English term. Any compassion that does not begin with ourselves is probably a pose. Thus, the double is not a phenomenon which indicates a confusion of identity. It is individuation, self-awareness which allows compassion to emerge. The fact that the process begins with the individual has little to do with the connotations of the word "individualism" which are prevalent today. It is closer to the opposite. The ironic twist in the use of doubles in *Moment of Freedom* is that distance from the self, the creation of two selves, creates an opening for compassion.

4.

The most revealing use of a double occurs in the third section of the book, "Lemuria," which brings the reader back to the narrator's present. The fear of a coming "trial" or final accounting begins to plague the Servant of Justice. It comes in the form of a paradoxical dream about liberation (155-57).

He is in the gallery of a prison and is witness to a terrible revolt. The prison guards are "white with fear"
as thousands of imprisoned voices scream in unison "one endless, powerful, surging howl of hatred and revenge" (156). The prisoners break loose and go howling throughout the immense prison "dressed in rags or mad carnival costumes." As the revolt gathers force the screaming and howling begins to take on the form of a song, and the activity to resemble a dance. "A hoarse and terrifying roar of a thousand throats, a long 'awh ... awh ... awh ...'":

From the roof were hung ropes with great, sharp fish hooks in them, and one by one the guards and functionaries were lifted in the air with the hooks in their mouths. A pair of feet swung past me, naked, and bleeding from the heels ... The song had a few words which were repeated continuously through the groaning, rhythmic roar: "...Congratulations--this beautiful day ...!" (157)

The explosiveness of the event only proceeds to grow in potential until the prisoners smash through the walls. Filled with anxiety, the narrator/dreamer is carried with the flood of humanity out into the streets, and the look on the faces of the mob foretells that the thing which will happen "would be worse than anyone had believed." The prisoners stream about him in "freedom" and the dreamer's only thought is to get away. Then comes a change in tone. He sees a little boy who has been forgotten, crying while "there was no one who was looking after him or thinking of him":
With an intense effort I overcame my fear of death, and stopped beside him. I took him by the hand and walked with him. He stopped crying. I knew at once that he was called Iwan, and the city around us was beautiful, it had broad streets and red brick buildings behind a park, wild vines and high poplars with dark, lush foliage. The air was clear and autumnal, the sky revealed that it was afternoon with a light reddish glow in the air. The prisoners still ran dancing and roaring through the streets, past us and further on. I walked calmly holding Iwan by the hand.

He looked up at me and smiled, and the fear in my heart was gone. Instead I felt serene and secure. (158)

This dream, once again, displays a highly ambivalent attitude toward freedom. Freedom for an individual is frightening. Freedom--liberation--for a society of oppressed human beings is equally frightening, if for other reasons. The mixed joy and horror of "the beautiful day" in the dream is in fact heavily weighted toward the horror--the terrible fear of the observer, who could be seen as being complicit with the jailers and judged guilty. The dream is a foreboding of a final accounting, a final justice, that itself threatens to be applied without justice. The decision to take care of the child resolves this fear of "the great transformation." If no one thinks of the child, freedom, transformation, liberation has no meaning: it is an absurd letting-off of steam by the oppressed. Once the child is not by-passed, once his hand has been clasped, both psychic and social chaos can be overcome. This image of the duo--the older man and the young boy holding hands--will prove to be an emblem for compassion ("medlidenhet") in Bjørneboe's oeuvre: it is found in the form of the sailor and the young stowaway in
Jonas, and it will appear again in the forms of first mate Jensen and young Pat in the final novel, *The Sharks*. Once again, in the dream sequence, we are confronted with a double. The dreamer knows, without being told, that the child's name is Iwan—the Norwegian for which is Jens. The Russian name conjures up the memory of the final episodes of *Duke Hans* when, near to death in the palace of Iwan the Terrible, the young Duke asks quite arbitrarily for one young monk out of a group to be spared the torture of the wheel: for the monk is a figure in which he sees himself. In the dream in *Moment of Freedom*, he refers to little Iwan as his "own, unknown self" ("eget, ukjente jeg" [158]). Once again, the emergence of the double makes it possible for compassion to come to life. The precise nature of this unknown self Bjørneboe will refrain from defining, until the last volume of the trilogy. But the poem by Rilke which he uses as an epigraph to "Lemuria" provides a clue. "Buddha in der Glorie" begins with "Mitte aller Mitten, Kern der Kerne," and ends with, "Doch in dir ist schon begonnen / was die Sonnen übersteht" (143). The History of Bestiality can be read as a kind of meta-Bildungsroman, in the style of Novalis, in which a tiny seed or nucleus grows not only into a soul or a self, but grows towards what Mahayana Buddhism refers to as "the Great Self." The act of taking the child by the hand seems disobedient to the laws of necessity or survival. That is the very point: "Only in the courage born of desperation can you grasp a
handful of freedom." Freedom is not something one is
given, but something which one must take "without asking
anyone if the thing you are doing is moral or harmful or
good." As a witness to the truth of this assertion,
language itself is called upon by Bjørneboe to testify: In
all languages people say "I take the liberty...."

For example: I hereby take the liberty of stating my
critique of all established customs, practice, methods, and
above all the dogma and philosophy which are their
foundation. (179)

The echoes of Nietzsche's transvaluation of values are
ringing here, and a human being who is undertaking a
reevaluation of all norms and values, who must give a new
name to everything if need be, stands before an abyss.
Nietzsche described just such an abyss in The Birth of
Tragedy, and Sartre depicted it anew in Nausea. Strindberg in the second volume of Son of a Servant also
described his sudden discovery of something vast and beyond
the powers of language to identify when he found himself on
the heights over the Stockholm archipelago, a very literal
abyss. Peter Weiss's narrator in his trilogy The
Esthetics of Resistance has an experience of "flying" over
his city, and looking down in wonder on a world of objects
which are suddenly without names (Wallenstrom, 1: 103).
Bjørneboe turns once again to a dream in order to run this
psychic state into an image of a "nausea" which takes the
special form of vertigo. The image is that of a man at the
The narrator is climbing a rocky slope. It grows steeper, the landscape vanishes in the fog. Without "any feeling of having the heavens (himmelen) above" him, he continues for what seems to be days (183-84). He comes finally to a wall which prevents passage to the other side. He lies in a narrow cave, wedged in the rocks of the mountain, when the wall moves to one side, and he stands before a "blinding, flaming sunshine full of every color" (184). Creeping forward he sees a fertile valley and beyond it the sea:

I stood far out at the edge of the abyss, while the dizziness and fear grew in my body. It was thousands of meters down to land, and I leaned out from the mountain ledge. This entire side of the mountain was as vertical as a wall, but in any case with cracks and footholds to climb on. After going a few meters along the rock wall the fear had multiplied to a point far greater than what it had been in the darkness and the cave. To turn back was not possible. The only thing left, was to hang over the abyss until I tumbled down into all of the wonderful splendour below me, or to manage the climb down. (185)

Unlike the vertigo-like experiences of his existentialist predecessors, Bjørneboe's experience takes place at an abyss that is quite specific. It is fixed geographically. The sea below is the Mediterranean. The climb downward and probably southward to "Antiquity's Mediterranean" will constitute the course the narrator takes in his pilgrimage through the trilogy, until he reaches the final words: "And so the travels end, Columbus."
The point where the process of change has taken root in the narrator is isolated in the final section "Lemuria." That is, the Servant records it in this final section, but in chronological time it appears to have taken place during the "Praiano" period described earlier. It is in the catacombs of Rome that the "Kern der Kerne" begins to germinate. It is the experience of the catacombs—to which he had been relentlessly drawn—which represents the actual beginning of his doubts, which have now grown so strong that he can no longer remember his own name. It is the experience most closely resembling the nausea described by Nietzsche and Sartre—in which words, names, in short, meaning, drop away. The final, ambiguous moment of illumination in the catacombs is a moment of death-awareness ("dødsbevissthet"), the awareness which must come before the moment of freedom. Here the Nordic author, Bjørneboe, discovers the secret of the labyrinth about the same time as many of his Latin contemporaries. The "labyrinth of solitude" leads to the "here that is all places and the now that is all times." It is an experience of death. Or, one might say, it is an experience of mythic time, sacred time.

In the catacombs sequence, as the narrator follows along with a custodian through the miles of endless tunnels
under Rome--where one can easily disappear without a trace without such a guide--the process begins. The sensation is that of being in a dream. Images begin to glide about him, and he starts to hear the custodian's voice speaking German and English at the same time. It is "a perfect, completely simultaneous translation." The images of tombs and altars and the people about him transmute into a primeval scene of song, dance, joyful voices singing to the accompaniment of flutes in an unknown language. Again the images change character, and the figures become acquaintances of his, speaking in the various tongues of Europe. He emerges from the catacombs still lost in the images, and the "humming" which he felt inside lingers. He does not recognize the woman he has been traveling with. He asks who she is. Then he asks who he is. But the names she utters back to him mean nothing to him. In fact the name she attributes to herself makes him laugh "because I thought it was a wrong name." He adds, "I knew nothing. Not where I'd come from. Not who I was" (196). Like Sartre's Rouquentin, a massive disorientation descends upon him when all names, labels and signs are removed from things-in-the-world. And it is in this ferment of essences without labels that growth can begin.

6.

While the central metaphor of a disease associated with
decay runs through *Moment of Freedom*, the moment of truth in the catacombs is an awakening, a moment when the "Kern der Kerne" can begin its growth. It is the germination of a cure. The remainder of the volume is written from the "cooler view of the world" in Heiligenberg. In fact, many of the final passages in the book switch into a black comic mode, which contrasts sharply with the sequences above. The narrative cuts abruptly to a memory of Germany in jubilation after the declaration of war--tramping boots, howling party-goers, laughter and good fellowship--during a visit to a Nazi-operated bordello. Shortly thereafter comes the ironic "true" parable of the Nazi prison guard Schweinhund, which provides a prime example of the black humor that is woven through the text. Schweinhund returns to Germany at the war's end after having served in the occupation of the narrator's home country as a prison guard: because he only kicked his prisoners to display his peculiar sense of humor without doing anything worse to them, after the war they respond to his letters appealing for assistance to rebuild his life on the ruins of Germany. He uses the assistance to start a vast business empire (204-09).

These final sequences strike a stark contrast for reasons that are more than stylistic. They portray situations in which a complete lack of death-awareness reigns, while death is hanging over everyone like a lead pendulum. The Servant of Justice recounts now how he began
to keep his protocols. He tells of how the first comprehensive documentation of Nazi medical experiments fell into his hands after the outbreak of peace. The transcripts of trials against the former regime's doctors were given to him by a Doctor Ignatius Feuermann, and afterwards he investigated the "familiar" background of the crimes. "All of this," he writes, "is recorded in the introductory chapters of the first protocol" (209). This is, once again, a manipulation of authorial presence in the text. That Bjørneboe himself was given the documents as he describes it, and that it gave rise to his first novel, *Before the Cock Crows* (*Før hanen galer*), is a point of absolute identification between the author and the narrator or internal author of the History of Bestiality. It also suggests that the History of Bestiality includes all ten novels Bjørneboe had written up to this point. The narrator reports that as a result of the subjects he recorded in his first ledgers, a darkness of a new sort began to cast itself over his life (209). One of the several isolated memories in the final pages of the book is that of being kicked senseless on an empty street, bleeding, his head near a mound of dog excrement, by a man in a uniform (219). This bracketed or detached memory, of a gesture which sums up a truth of our times, serves to take the discourse further away once again from the biography of Jens Bjørneboe, and back to the allegorical persona--the Servant of Justice.
Finally, in the Alpine city, there is another Foehn wind, and several more good citizens are converted into impulsive killers. Drinking with his companions, the Sexton and the Bell-ringer, the Servant remarks that the worst months of the Foehn wind are yet to come. The Servant finishes by announcing the completion of the last volume of his protocols. The fact that it is not completed—there is further recording to be done in the next two books of the trilogy—should testify to what depths and lengths the moment of truth must grow, before it may bloom into the moment of freedom. It also brings the dilemma of the keeper of the protocols cheek by jowl with the dilemma of the author himself. It is, in part, this ebb and flow of identification between the author Bjørneboe and the narrator of the History of Bestiality which has given rise to the myth of Bjørneboe in his own country.

7.

The Powder House (Kruttårnet, 1969), subtitled "La poudrière" is the second volume in Bjørneboe's trilogy. It is also described on the title page as: "Scientific postscript and final protocol." This description, which appears to be intended in earnest, might provide an explanation for the lukewarm critical response the book initially received. The third volume in the cycle,
although it would receive a far more enthusiastic response than this volume, also initially received less open praise than the Moment of Freedom. This may be due to the fact that the later books strayed much further from the popular and academic expectations of what a modern novel should be than did the experiment with Moment of Freedom. It is in fact the case, however, that the The Powder House does not seem to stand up on its own as a novel. It is borne up by what comes before it and what comes after it, and was met with some incomprehension at the time. The fact of the matter is that even Moment of Freedom itself does not stand alone. The pilgrim is still far from his final destination. In The Powder House Bjørneboe is extending and deepening the use of certain techniques which he began in the earlier novel.

The narrator does not refer to himself as the "Servant of Justice" any longer. He is now caretaker of a unique mental hospital in the south of France, where he is referred to most often as "Jean." He points out that the international assemblage of patients and staff at the hospital all call him by the name familiar in their own tongues: Jean, Iwan, Giovanni and Jochanaan (KT 119). He is still keeping his protocols, while pursuing his official vocation as hospital handyman. He is in fact "combined Caretaker and Superior at the institution" (19). Thus, he has a grasp of everything that is going on at La Poudrière--in the world of nature and in the interpersonal
world of the little closed society there. The cast of characters includes: the chief physician Dr Lefévre, Jean's confidant and drinking mate, who in moments of despair has the habit of demanding a story from the narrator; al Assadun, Lefévre's Algerian assistant; Ilja, a Russian anarchist nurse; Christine, a French nurse, who becomes a lover to the narrator; Fontaine, a Belgian sex murderer; Lacroix, a suicidal executioner; Dr Báthory, a Hungarian of wealthy lineage who served with the German SS and later with both the French Foreign Legion and US Army in Algeria and Indochina as paratrooper and "interrogator"; an American general who suffers from remorse over the scandal brought on by his murder of a black maid when he returned from Vietnam; and the wife of the Russian Ambassador who tolerates no criticism of her country and howls like a wolf; and finally the "extras," the patients and staff. As is the case in so many other works of literature in which a madhouse is presented as a microcosm of the world, all the tensions of the outside world manifest themselves here. The difference is that in this case the tensions and conflicts are often geo-political: superpower versus superpower, developed world versus underdeveloped, colonizer versus colonized, north versus south, the powerful versus the powerless. The central metaphor of the madhouse is justified, by the narrator's assertion that though we live in a world beautiful beyond all imagination, "we have turned this paradise to a slaughterhouse, a morgue
and a criminal asylum" (39). Here Bjørneboe has latched onto a key metaphor also employed by his contemporaries Peter Weiss, in Marat/Sade, and Dürrenmatt in The Physicists—and looking back 100 years, Ibsen, in the scene at Begriffenfeldt's clinic in Peer Gynt.

The plot of the book, which allows it to maintain the vaguest claims to kinship with more traditional types of novels, resembles slightly that of a third-world thriller in the style of Graham Greene. And although the plot supplies the threads which bind the "material" together, the threads are so thin as to vanish from sight for thirty, forty pages at a time. Dr Bárthory is found dead, hanging on the grounds of the hospital. The question of who killed the former SS and Foreign Legion torturer is not delved into deeply by either police or detectives. All they discover is that it was not a "natural death, that is, by hanging" but that "someone or other had broken his neck first, and hoisted him up afterwards." Considering the unusual political involvements of almost everyone at La Poudrière, almost anyone could be guilty—and the staff would be among the prime suspects: al Assadun, as an Algerian; Lefévre, as a French anti-authoritarian; Ilja, with his anarchist inclinations and surprising physical strength; perhaps even the narrator himself. Certainly many of the patients are capable of the crime. The narrator believes that there was no one in La Poudrière who did not hold Bárthory in contempt, but he is corrected by
Ilja, who points out that there were two people who admired him: "that nymphomaniac Leninist-fascist Mrs Ambassador, who keeps on with those Siberian howls of hers at night, the wolf lady from the Kremlin--and that little black-killer from the Pentagon." They are said to admire Báráthy as a man who helped "spread the culture of France throughout the entire underdeveloped world" (118). It is the caretaker, the narrator himself, who suggests a solution to the embattled Dr Lefévre, who wants to save his unique asylum, but cannot come up with the amount of money the police have discreetly requested for a finding of "suicide" in the investigation. He is to ask the police to go slow, and to address himself to the deceased Báráthory's family. Báráthy comes from a great banking family now living in France, that owns half of Bretagne (132). Since they would do anything to hide a possible suicide in their own family--they don't know all the facts in the case--the narrator suggests to Lefévre that he should intimate to them that the police require half a million francs for a less embarrassing death certificate. Jean, as caretaker, will attest that he found Báráthory with his neck broken after a fall from a tree. In this manner, the case is closed without being solved--and the reader is left with the nagging knowledge that almost any one of the principal characters could have carried out the "execution."

Another subplot, drawn in a black, satirical style, involves the affair between the American general and the
Soviet Ambassador's wife, who despite their chauvinism, are driven together partly as a result of the anti-superpower ostracism on the part of the others at the hospital. The narrator objects to this ostracism: "No one at a place like La Poudrière will be given the cold shoulder. We are all of us, equally great criminals" (189). The nurse Christine reports the problems among the patients, with a parodic edge in her words which, it might be said, belongs with the narrator, and not with her:

It's due to the fact that both of them--the Ambassador's wife and the general--have been going around saying that the world today can only be mastered by the genuine superpowers; all other countries have to relinquish their sovereignty and come to terms with being satellite states without their own foreign, military or economic policies. Small independent states are an anachronism from the last century. (189)

An additional subplot is the relationship between the twenty year old nurse Christine, and the middle-aged Jean. The episodes depicting them together, intimate and sexual scenes, are textured with a lyricism that brings the narrator's reflections close to the pulsing life in the southern French landscape. These "scenes" stand in sharp contrast to the cold, razor-edged satire of the dialogues with the other staff members, and the ironic tone of the supposedly scientific/academic lectures, which, it soon becomes evident, are the raison d'être of the book. In The Powder House the story is thin, but the history is dense.
According to Lefévre's policy, everyone at La Poudrière has the right to give lectures on a topic of their choice. In the course of the narrative, three such lectures are given. The first lecture is given by the narrator himself, and is entitled: "The witches' revolution: On Satan's conquest of power, the witches' world dominion, and on the great fear" (61-98). These 37 pages are "scientific" only in so far as they contain myriads of facts and references. The tone of the lecturer—in his case the narrator himself has taken the lectern—is ironic. He praises his enemies, and condemns those with whom we would have expected him to identify. Citing "Paulus, Augustine, Calvin and Luther" he begins with the work of the theologians of "the Gospel of Love" to rid the earth of Satan's agents: "Several tens of millions of false Christians, spies and agents for His Black Majesty, with spouses and often very small children, were subjected to pillory and fire" in the course of 200 years (62). Finding justification for the witch hunt in Luther's "De rebus civilibus" and "De Christi Reditu ad Iuditium" (63-64), he launches into a prolonged and detailed description of witch symptomatology, the science of extracting confessions, the instruments used, and the practice of witchburning.

The description extends to other "types" who carry out the Devil's work. Among other things, the narrator/lecturer gives an account of the public torture
and quartering of Damien after his attempt on the life of Louis XV—a motif Bjørneboe had used first in an earlier essay on the Marquis de Sade. The evidence that the lecturer brings forth shows that the first modern age of bestiality in the form of the witch hunt did not occur in the so-called Dark Ages, but during the Renaissance—the age of enlightenment. The scope of this activity, curiously, seems to correlate with the degree of enlightenment. Each time science and human thought take a leap forward, "the Great Fear" is unleashed. And this is not limited to the witch hunts of the Renaissance. For the witch hunts of the Church in the 17th century are simply the "Church's variant of The Permanent Witch-hunt, of the eternal witch trials which are most characteristic of that race which inhabits the planet." The acceleration and expansion of the witch trials up to our own time, and their "numbers of condemned, burned and maimed, has, in the last fifty-sixty years alone, been colossal" (93).

The narrator/lecturer traces the origins of the witch hunt. Now, as during the time of Copernicus and Galileo, the witch hunt is a result of the Great Fear. The origins and growth of this fear can be summed up in the following equation: "The greater the insight, the greater the fear" (93). Humanity's staggering insights into the forces governing the cosmos as it entered the twentieth century once again unleashed this fear. To underscore the continuity of the phenomenon, the narrator/lecturer names
some of the historical figures who took charge of the awesome duties of prosecuting witch hunts without regard to the epoch in which they lived: "I mention, among many, the apostle Paul and the lawyer Lenin" (96). These are the type of men who turn humanity's strivings into institutions that facilitate the witch-hunt. "In the Church there is no Christianity, in the Party no Socialism." In pursuing the Saboteur of the world it was important to get confessions and names of co-conspirators before the accused witches died. Thus "the method" was born: "All great hunters, from Calvin to Adolphe Germanicus and Stalinissimus the Great, have depended upon it" (96). Humanity's insight was so great in our own time, that it brought forth a new man, Homo Lupus, who took over after the first decades of this century (97).

The author's intention, again, is not to imply that the witch hunt is a phenomenon belonging only to our age. The "permanent witch hunt" has been present for eons, in an active or dormant state--ready to be charged up again on the power of new scientific and philosophical insights, in short, whenever an old faith or an old world order is threatened by new knowledge. With the emergence of Homo Lupus, however, it acquires entirely new potential for destruction:

After the contributions of these great men, The Great Work has come to completion: the human being has been unmasked, the mask is torn away, and the wolf teeth are visible. Homo Lupus has stood forth in all his splendor. This
phenomenon, that the Permanent Witch Hunt advances to a hurricane of persecutions, happens each time the faith is threatened. No particular faith, but the faith that everything has a secure and certain meaning. When the faith that the cosmos—the fire beneath us and the empty, dead and endless space above us—has meaning, is threatened, then the faith rises up to crush the Infidel. This is the Great Fear, and it arises in times of skepticism, reason and enlightenment, criticism.

Now that Mankind believes itself to be on the verge of conquering space, what will become of Homo Lupus? At this juncture the lecturer changes his tone, and the madhouse caretaker now "speaks" with the cadence of a Zarathustra—an apocalyptic, pseudo-biblical language, not unlike that which Nietzsche forged for his own anti-Gospel:

My dear friends!
I have myself seen all of this in a dream, and you know that a man like me can prophesy. Wolf shall hunt wolf, and the universe shall echo with the wolf howls of the planet, and the fear will grow and grow, and the hunt shall continue and continue. And homo lupus is still new in this world, but homo lupus shall rule over it.

[...] And the beauty in the stars and the wind and the desert and the forests, in the sky, and the plains and the mountains and the rivers and the shores, everything shall be drowned by the wolf howl which is humanity's last voice.
And the fear shall tear at the wolf's heart. (97)

Returning to his more scientific voice, the lecturer thanks his listeners, and suggests that only by posing a problem correctly can we find our way to a correct answer.
9.
The second lecture (134-77) is given by the professional executioner Lacroix, still wearing high bandages about his throat after his recent suicide attempt. His topic will be execution and executioners—"from the point of view of the executioner," one who has "the same right to respect, kindness and compassion as all other human creatures have" (134). What follows, in the text, is a forty two page detailed description of the executioner's trade and art, from the high Middle Ages to our day. Generally speaking, the techniques described range from the oldest traditional forms, the chopping block and tortures associated with the Inquisition, hanging, the guillotine, the firing squad, and finally the American electric chair. The focus of the lecture, more than anything else, is on the changing nature of killing by the state, and its effect on those "men in possession of special qualities" who carry it out. Once again, Bjørneboe observes some of the same trends as his contemporary Foucault in Surveiller et punir. They both note that the notion of the sanctity of the body led to the transformation of public torture, to a demonstration of atonement "without suffering," carried out coldly with supposedly scientific and painless methods, in secluded spaces which shroud the event in an air of mystery for the modern public. Whereas Foucault seems to acknowledge a certain increasing humaneness—coupled, paradoxically, with growing authoritarianism—in disciplining and punishing,
Bjørneboe's standpoint is that this is only a myth which the new methods of carrying out and staging executions are designed to promote.²⁴

From the point of view of the executioner/lecturer, the executioner has always been an artist observed by a public of hypocrites. "To take the life of another human being without pain and brutality, is he not an artist?"

But my colleagues are unfortunately far from artists of this dimension. Sentimentality and weak nerves are incompatible with the executioner's work, as with that of a great violinist. Or the performance of a great pianist. Not to mention the profession of the authors and poets: here everything is coolness, awareness and precision. (137)

A change in public taste at the end of the 1700s made the work of an executioner dangerous, and "a pianist who loses his nerve and self control, will hardly be trampled to death by the mob, such as happened many a time in the era of public executions" (137). It was the public nature of the spectacle which caused the loss of nerve, the half successful first attempts by executioners in the procedures, the frequent disasters. The great "houses" or dynasties of European executioners--the Langs, the Deiblers, the Flurats, the Deussers--are here given the chance to have their story told. Society had forced the burden upon them. There seemed to be no escape from the hereditary nature of the work, nor from the ostracism of the community which required that it be done. In their saga, the society they serve is in fact their nemesis. The
henchmen become victims, dionysian performers in a great repeating ritual, the sacred mission of which prescribes that they must carry the responsibility of society's need to kill on their shoulders. They are figures at the same time sacred and accursed. A curious aspect of Bjørneboe's thinking here is that it is the executioners who become the simultaneously holy and accursed figures, the sacred outcasts--the pharmakos--that in antiquity had usually referred to the victims of the ax themselves.25

It is in 1793 during the Great Revolution--when the doors to the Age of Reason and to increased humanitarianism should have been thrown open by the philosophies of humanism--that the guillotine is introduced as a serious innovation: "The quick, painless and one hundred percent effective execution" (145). Other methods were introduced with the same ideas in mind, and in this way Europe entered the age of the mass execution. These passages exemplify the way Bjørneboe is constantly on the lookout for ways in which social innovations can demarcate new "ages" in history. Thus, the chapters of this volume, such as this one devoted to Lacroix's lecture, use the calendar of the French revolution: Lacroix's lecture is dated 24. prairial, year 176.

The lecturer now puts forth bountiful evidence to counter the claims of the exponents of these technological innovations. Scientific investigations and long experience invalidate the claims of the period. The evidence: life is
observed in amputated heads by reputable scientific authorities; the frequent need to repeat the prolonged shock or "burning" in the American electric chair, and the truth about why autopsies are held immediately after the procedure; the remarkable record of fallibility with firing squads. All of this is explored with a cool directness, which lacks the irony and humor of "The Witches' Revolution." Rolling off a list of names of executioners who ended on the scaffold themselves, the lecturer turns to the modern myth of the social function of executions (148). Remarking that "no one knew better than these men, what kind of horror is involved in an execution," he addresses the theory of the general preventative effect of capital punishment. For who should fear the scaffold more than men who have carried out thousands of executions? "What deterring effect has it had? None, ladies and gentlemen. None!" He continues: "The amputated bodies of executed executioners are the best historical and psychological evidence against the punishment's general-preventative effect" (148). On the other side of the coin are the accounts of executioners who have passed sentence—and carried it out—against themselves, in Germany, England and America. Finishing his long compilation of accounts, the lecturer asks a question on behalf of the executioners: "Who has turned us into suicides, ladies and gentlemen?" (175). Lacroix's long lecture is a segment which could well be the most potent
literary case to be made against capital punishment in any language, and this might be said to apply as well to The Powder House as a whole.

The final lecture is given by Doctor Lefévre himself: "The Heretic-Burning Culture" ("Kjetterbålenes kultur" [203]). It is he who poses the culminating questions raised by the lecture series. "Why do we treat each other the way we do on this microcosmic crust, this layer of mould and organic life, putrefaction, consciousness and cruelty?" He has no hope of an answer, for "where the answers begin, there begins bestiality" (205). But the concept of heresy and the heretic provides a key. The lecturer traces the genesis of our modern heretics and "traitors" to the persecutions of the early gnostics—of the Albigenses and Catharists. These were people who were killed by the thousands, who could have saved themselves from their fate "only by changing their minds" (209). The Church bathed in the blood not of the martyrs it lost, but of the martyrs it made (209-10). The "heretic" is the thing which is to be considered the miracle. Those who have maintained the belief that they are right, through torture and death—at the hands of the Calvins, the Luthers, the Hitlers, the Stalins—they are proof of the strength of consciousness. The lecturer concludes by citing the anarchist victims of the Haymarket executions in Chicago, whose last words of defiance were "words that should give the American people something to live for."
Then Hebrew mythology is cited: "so long as there are still 37 just men in the world, so long can the world continue to be" (214). This is a new facet of the Jewish myth of the Laamed vov tzadik (not mentioned by name by Bjørneboe) which is unsettling in the significance the myth holds for humankind today. Bjørneboe's search for meaning and revelation in myth, when confronted with the insoluble dilemmas and riddles of history and existence, is the heart of his approach.

10.

The lectures are quite relentless, considering their subject matter, the first two interrupted only by mentions of "breaks" for coffee and cake. In between, however, they are contrasted with softer, often lyrical episodes—neither pedantic nor linear, but broken, partial, descriptive. They include descriptions of landscape; memories of children in deprived areas of the world (a recurring motif is how these children look when they are drinking); the narrator's meditations on the hedgehog which comes sniffing around his house looking for something to drink; and his intimacy with the French nurse Christine, also a figure intimately bound up with the French landscape. The sexual depictions contrast with the untextured moments of sexual action in Without A Stitch: these are stills. Action is not important. On the contrary, it is the attempt to
preserve the image which matters. This is done, not so much in order to fossilize a moment of ecstasy, but instead to create an eternal moment, a moment of art, an alternative to the eternal and brutalizing world of human action.

Yet even in love, in the "still" moments, there are always the reminders of the thing that nags. Christine sees a picture above the narrator's desk. It shows a partisan, about to be hanged, both arms raised in defiance as he is surrounded by officers and his captors. Christine asks him why he has it hanging over his desk:

"I have it there so that everything I copy in the protocols would bear being read by him," I answered.
"You let him read it first?"
"Yes. I want it to be true, whatever I write down. So he reads it first."
"How long have you had it hanging there?"
"At least a year here. But I had it up in the place where I lived before too. And it's hanging on the other wall--over there."
She turned and caught sight of the same picture on the opposite wall.
"Doesn't it drive you mad?"
"Yes," I said. (108)

Thus, even the internal and eternal moments of love exist between walls that reflect the very picture of human cruelty and heroism back at each other.

The Powder House, again, is structured as an anti-novel. On the first page it is described as "poetic naturalism" and sources are cited. But a lyric text is juxtaposed to the text which purports to be empirical and
historical. The boundaries which define our conception of what a novel is are forced to expand or even dissolve under the pressure of texts such as this one, in which so many conflicts in style, form and content are held between two covers. The thin plot concerning the murder of Dr Bárthory actually presages the main thrust of the next novel in the trilogy. Al Assadun ("Lion" in Arabic, another of Dante's allegorical beasts at the gateway to Hell) celebrates simultaneously the birth of his infant son and Dr Bárthory's death. But only "Allah—and yet one more--know who carried out the execution," says al Assadun. This scene, with its contradictory celebration of death and birth, recalls the paradoxical dream of the "beautiful day" in the first book, in which the new freedom of the escaped prisoners is united with murder. Now there comes a hint, in this small scene, of the reality behind the dream.

11.

In The Silence (Stillheten, 1973)--subtitled "An anti-novel, and absolutely final protocol"--the contradictory dream of liberation and the fear inspiring moment of freedom, find their correlatives in the real world. The narrator lives now in a city in a North African state, one of those recently released from the political bondage of colonialism. "The city" of which he has a bird's-eye view from his window is a city of man which is
imbued with a Dante-esque significance. "Outside of the French windows, beyond the balcony, the great city lies beneath me" (SH 6). The effects of past exploitation and economic dependency are still to be seen in the roving flocks of hungry children which roam the streets. They corner all westerners who emerge from bars and restaurants, scattering only when bread or money are thrown over their heads. They offer sexual favors to white visitors—and they are capable of anything. It is in this depraved, post-colonial third world capital that the narrator, referred to as "Jean" when referred to at all, spends his days wandering the streets and meeting in cafes with his conversation partner Ali—a European educated revolutionary who is hiding from the security forces of his own country. Somewhere in Africa, Ali's comrades are moving in darkness in the forest, preparing for the future. The mood conveyed by the narrative from the first pages is one of apprehension.

The inevitable will come. This time it will happen. But for the moment all I hear is the silence. There is nothing but silence left. Nothing is happening. Everything is waiting. For something which has never been before, and no one knows the nature of. We haven't a clue what will happen--we know only that it is coming. After the silence comes the great transformation. (6)

Between the lusty and ironic political dialogues with Ali, the narrator stumbles upon as unlikely a crew of interlocutors as can be imagined. First, there are the
inhabitants of the city itself in the here and now.
Besides Ali, there is also the "nice American" who went to
live with his own country's enemies during the Vietnam war:
he has come to this poor country independently, to make a
gift of his western know-how in developing their oil
resources. He is constantly inebriated, and throws too
much money out to the starving flocks of children, due to
some kind of deep seated shame he feels. Then there is the
young Arab girl who follows the narrator in the street to
offer the "monsieur" sexual favors: she is disappointed
when she gets money for nothing—for as Jean realizes
later, she is hoping for a place off the streets to sleep.
Besides these inhabitants of the here-and-now, there are
other conversation partners inhabiting this "city" in the
"here which is all places and the now which is all times."
One of them is a morose and deeply depressed Christopher
Columbus, who is obsessed about the Pandora's box he opened
in human history. He shall learn, in his dialogues with
the narrator, that the New World—which had no roving bands
of starving children upon his arrival—is now overrun with
them, and shall conclude: "Mea maxima culpa." Yet another
conversation partner is an acquaintance from Rome: God.
The narrator recalls his dinner with God in that
other city of man. It took place one day when he had been
mulling over the question of his own soundness of mind:
"Was it that I apprehended the encounter with the world
with bloodier nerves than most people? Is it sickness or
health?" He decides it is a sign of health. "It is I who am healthy, the others are sick" (85-86). But he begins to doubt that his protocol will ever be finished "because it has no beginning and no end...." Before God joins him for dinner, he has reached the following conclusion: "It is in this the illness lies: we cannot, at all, imagine a world without bestiality as the final argument of those who rule! We cannot imagine a society that is not built upon raw force" (86). God's arrival breaks into his brooding. Of course God is in a manner of speaking the ultimate double, and the narrator mentions having spoken "rather often" with him on these subjects, although God and the narrator have very different ideas of just what is at the source of this destructive sickness which human beings have brought with them into the world. The role of this "God" as a double is underscored here by the description of him as an itinerant beggar, which endows Him with qualities typical of other Bjørneboe doubles. The narrator has to lend him money so that they can dine together. In this particular discussion God begins to express concern for his host. God:

Can't you finish with the History of Bestiality? That's the thing which is destroying your appetite and your stomach. If you're going to sit around thinking about freshly carved up children every time you eat a crayfish tail, that can't be to any good. Finish with that wretched stuff.

The response:

I shall never finish.... You're not going to get off the hook so easily! (88)
God promises him that his digestion and appetite will be returned to normal if he stops. "The world shall be yours," he promises. He pursues the point by offering him wealth, health, and a salaried position in UNESCO—if only he will fall on his knees "in worship," adding, "It doesn't matter whom you kneel to, whom you worship—it can be in east or west, it can be in north or south. But fall down on thy knees and worship--and this world shall be thine!"

It is here that God's host notices his guest's tail for the first time. Later, he will meet "God" nearby the African city in the desert. This time, speaking to him from a "fig-cactus" (sic), he will offer the narrator the ultimate temptation: "Worship, and you shall be worshipped!"

(88-89). This is perhaps the clearest possible example of age-old advocacy of hierarchy through theological reasoning.

In the final section of this volume, "La Rue du grand peur" a further conversation partner is introduced. It is dominated by an extended dialogue with Maximilien Robespierre—the contents of which appear to be gleaned from Max Gallo's political biography of Robespierre. In the dialogue, the contradictions and changes in Robespierre's positions in his fierce and idealistic political career are outlined. The implicit parallel is drawn with the contradictions faced by all those who attempt revolution or social transformation (173-89). In a café dialogue Maximilien is informed of the success of
the man named Lenin, whose policies—despite his marked similarities to Robespierre the "incorruptible"—Maximilien assesses with skepticism. In this dialogue, freedom of the press, the abolition of slavery, abolition of the death penalty, absolute human rights, and equality—traditional revolutionary demands, all of which had their greatest advocate in the figure of Robespierre—are pitted against necessity: the need to improve living conditions quickly, to wipe out corruption wherever it arises in official quarters, and to halt the attacks of internal and external enemies. This is the problem of freedom versus terror. Although history recalls what positions Robespierre took in the end on many of these questions, it is Bjørneboe's intention here to make a reader think twice. He has Robespierre defending the Marquis de Sade, who early on supported Robespierre's campaign against the death penalty, and the rights of the black populations in the colonies. Bjørneboe's Robespierre insists it was Sade who spoke with the voice of "common sense," which has from time to time been a trait of true revolutionaries: "You let a man die, my honored colleagues, because he has killed another. That's two dead men instead of one" (184). Bjørneboe's Robespierre defends Sade from his reputation. He was a dutiful, engaged citizen to the end, and as a prisoner of feudal rulers, he was preoccupied with the vices of the aristocracy and the mighty, of a dying age. He portrayed, to use his own words, "a corrupted century" (185).
Much as the Bellringer and the Sexton, the conversation partners in *Moment of Freedom*, speak a language which fits more closely than that of the narrator themselves, Maximilien's discourse on Sade veers toward editorializing, and all sense of *agons* or debate vanishes from the dialogue as the voices merge. This is evidence that the dialogue is not dramatic, but didactic. From Bjørneboe's pen, these historical characterizations are far different from the carefully individualized, untampered-with characterizations in, say, *The Dream and the Wheel*. It is one of those openings where the presence of the author surfaces through the narrative.

Emerging in *The Silence* is an apparent overriding concern with revolutions and transformation in a modern age, but alongside of this, the History of Bestiality continues. The protocols this time include a condensed chronicle of Cortés's conquest of Mexico.

The narrator has posed the question: "What was Europe's meeting with the rest of the world?" He suggests that there is a parallel to be drawn with the individual mind's meeting with reality. "In a way, one must go outside of oneself to meet oneself, and perhaps one has to go outside of Europe to achieve greater clarity in our picture of the illness of that part of the world" (14). As
one mind encounters a reality made by others, so does one culture encounter other cultures. In the second section of The Silence, "On the Art of making the World Uninhabitable," the history of the conquest of Mexico is told in a compact 23 pages—an economy which gives the history an icy clarity which might elude a reader of Díaz or De Las Casas (56-79). If one defines "myth" as that form of narrative which serves to make the vast and incomprehensible into something that can be grasped, this short story version of history, history in its barest outlines and in its essence, might qualify as myth: that is, not because it is false, for it is true, but because of its function. History is turned into myth which, in turn, can be used to interpret history. Bjørneboe highlights moments of history, then explodes them for a discharge of meaning: Cortés's decision to burn his own ships behind him; the amputation of the hands of Montezuma's messengers of peace; the mass slaughter of the invited Indian nobility at the festivities hosted by the Spanish in the enclosed palace of Cholula; the stoning of Montezuma the compromiser by his own people; the systematic leveling of the vast Aztec capital stone by stone. The recorder of the protocols has not simply recorded, but rather translated history into myth. Walter Benjamin once posited that there are "moments" in human history which become the discharge points for the processes and contradictions which have been gathering, and it is they which give "history" its meaning
in retrospect. This idea is important for understanding the approach Bjørneboe applies here. He has linked historical moments which have stored in them enormous potential for a discharge of meaning, and the resulting chain of signifying episodes produces an artifact with the aura of history—an epos most closely resembling myth. Cortés becomes an Agamemnon or a dark Odysseus. Mexico becomes a Troy as if from Virgil's point of view. The quest of modern Europe and its christianizing mission takes on a clear outline, like the mission of the ancient Greeks. Images of growing sickness are threaded through the narration. Once again, syphilis stands as the metaphor for the spread of the culture of the "tradesmen": the diseases of the Europeans spread easily among people who had no immunity to them. And this particular disease returned to Europe from the New World with immediate and deadly effect. This is as if to say, the oppressor damages not only the oppressed, but himself. Cortés ends his life in Spain wishing he could be back in Mexico in order to settle his accounts with God. The bill is long. "So he died a Christian syphilitic's death in God's name. His work was done: the paradise was a desert. In thirty years nineteen million were slaughtered. It's not every man who is vouchsafed the task of destroying a culture" (78).

Just as in the meeting with the world a soul can be crushed—as was Hertug Hans in Bjørneboe's youthful
novel—so is it possible that the modern mind, particularly after the age of gunpowder, can attempt to destroy the world in a futile attempt to make it over in its own image, as with Cortés or the Inquisition. There is an obvious parallel in this for those who live in the next age: the age of the atom.

In the meeting between mind and world, in our times, the necessary balance can be upset by sickness in the mind or sickness in the world. But the sick mind is not that which distances itself from the world's sickness. It is not the mind that cannot deal with the world. It is the mind which, too much, has been infected.

13.
Despite the narrator's ongoing concern with his chronicles or ledgers, he is increasingly preoccupied with the great changes which are to be expected. The problem of evil is giving way to the problem of revolution. This has been made clear from the opening lines of The Powder House:

It is not a question of whether we like them or want them.... They will not ask us what we think of them before they come. They will not concern themselves with common courtesy, but just come, one revolution after the other, they which together will carry out The Revolution, the great tidal wave which will arise and plough over us, a wave of hate and fire and blood. The only thing we could have done, would have been to do the revolution's work of our free will, to do it ourselves.... But we weren't capable of doing the work of our own free will.... (5)
The revolution has its material causes, to be sure, but it becomes clear that revolution is a term here imbued with metaphysical meaning. The Servant of Justice, in the end, will be back in the courtroom where he belongs, together with the mistreated, the powerless, the oppressed and the helpless (198). This time, though, he will be there to listen to them, not to fulfill the duties of his office as described in *Moment of Freedom*. He will now claim to understand the "higher meaning" of the trial: that wrong can be turned to right when the hour of judgment arrives.

It should be noted that the Norwegian term Bjørneboe uses here—"omveltning", meaning revolution or upheaval—has an apocalyptic resonance which the loan-word "revolusjon" does not. The voice of the narrator here, it can justifiably be asserted, has returned to that of the Servant of Justice, though he "serves" in a distinctly new capacity:

For what is the revolution if not the absolute trial? The revolution is the last and highest and most terrible form of settling the accounts.—The hangmen sit now as the accused—the oppressed, the humiliated and the wretched sit as prosecutors, judge and jury in the case. This will not prevent the possibility of new injustice, but this time the injustice is on the other side. That is: Even if the revolution bears its own guilt too, that guilt is part of the justice. I recall a king who said: After us the deluge will come. Indeed, it came... justice is frightening—but holy are they who have a hunger and a thirst for justice. Although the best would be if God forgave us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. (199)

It is certainly not immediately apparent what form this "justice" will take, from what quarters it will arise,
and who will define it. Is it simply the imposition of someone else's moral vision on the world, which the keeper of the protocols has so amply demonstrated often turns justice into its opposite? Some of the answers can be found in one of the dialogues with Ali. Ali describes the source of the drive toward justice as an unconscious "I" or "self", "along the lines of that which Jung calls collective unconscious, but I think it has to do with an individual unconscious.... A self that we don't know, but which is stronger and more decisive than the awake and conscious self we know about" (136). Can these two "selves" come in contact with each other?

Of course; it's this which we call sorcery or magic, if you will. For you Europeans the whole thing is just black superstition and madness. For us the supernatural is just as natural as plants and trees, as animals and people. That which we daily notice of this unconscious and inner "I" is our conscience and sense of justice.

Through the character of Ali a metaphysics of revolution is emerging. It suggests a social consciousness based upon attunement with one's self. It is far from the self-ishness or egotism of bourgeois or Protestant-ethic individualism. It is an individualism which implies self-knowledge.28 At a certain depth, the self is intimately bound up with the collective, humanity, the world. There exists a greater self, and perhaps it is this that is the source of the numerous doubles which people Bjørneboe's trilogy: the shadows, the Iwans, the Giovannis,
the man in the mirror, the visit of death in the hotel room—the long sequence of Bjørneboe doubles which actually begin with the young monk in which Hertug Hans sees himself, and begs the Czar to spare. Com-passion (med-lidenhet) and common humanity or solidarity (med-menneskelighet) spring from an inner source after all. Human beings have only to find their way back to that source. This is humanity's meeting with itself.

Concluding that he does not know if human beings are good or evil, and that it is up to human beings themselves to choose which side of themselves they want to nurture, the narrator comes to the realization that he has left something important out of the proceedings:

On a planet where human beings have chosen to let themselves be burned alive for the sake of the truth, the good must have great possibilities. The court was convened, the accusations read out, the witnesses heard, the evidence set out, humanity was found guilty. I kept the court protocols. But I am missing one voice in the courtroom, the Defense. (200)

14.

The culminating words of the History of Bestiality support Fredrik Wandrup's assessment in his biography that Bjørneboe was becoming more concerned with what he could find by way of hope for the many young people who were becoming his devoted readers in the seventies. Seeds of his planned "History of Freedom" can be seen sprouting in
the dark soil of the last book in the trilogy. It would never be completed--barely begun, in fact. Even so, the movement of ideas in the trilogy, and the culmination of those ideas in *The Sharks* (Haiene, 1973)--a fourth book which is frequently connected with the trilogy--might supply enough provocation to send a reader off on his own quest for signs of freedom in history and daily life, as Steiner Lem has suggested in his book on *Moment of Freedom*.30

As has been seen, the moment of freedom is not a moment in linear time. It surrounds. It is an ongoing process in the "now that is all times." The trilogy stands as a challenge, an electric charge, which is meant to activate the seed Rilke refers to in "Buddha in der Glorie" with the words "Mitte aller Mitten, Kern der Kerne" and in which both an individual self and a greater self are addressed: "Doch in dir ist schon begonnen / Was die Sonnen übersteht."

As with any trilogy, the simple configuration of three books almost immediately conjures associations with Dante's *Commedia*. In this case, the links are consciously and elaborately woven in. The use of Tuscany as the source of Western culture, and the frequent use of Florence as an emblematic "city" which connotes a greater community or society of man, reinforces suspicions that some of Dante's structuring principles might be present as well. The leopard, as was mentioned above, is the animal which the Servant of Justice encounters, as Dante encountered it at
the edge of the dark wood. For Dante, though, the leopard was not an emblem for bestiality, but of incontinence and the sins of self-indulgence. In Bjørneboe, the leopard is present as a harbinger of depression, the deep, recurring sickness with which the narrator must battle, and its other manifestation: alcohol. Bjørneboe writes in Moment of Freedom that anyone who has not experienced a full and extended depression is like a child, and describes the condition as that of "meeting something external, a beast of prey, a wild beast which tears the flesh off your bones." He adds, "Dante's image--the leopard--is entirely precise and true; I suspect he met it here in Florence, a city which is absolutely superbly suited to extended depressions" (FO 114-15). The wolf is Dante's emblem for fraud, usury, and exploitation of all kinds. In the second volume of the trilogy it is the wolf in the form of "Homo Lupus" which comes to prominence. The lion is Dante's representative for those circles of Hell reserved for the sins of heresy and bestiality. The name al Assadun, assigned to a character in The Powder House, also appears in an episode from The Silence concerning the vanished Jew Loevi, who is discovered to have converted to Islam before being buried facing Mecca under the name "al Assadun"--which means lion (as does this particular spelling of the Jewish name). How the parallels hold up with the bestiary of Dante is not clear here. Are these figures who take the part of oppressed peoples or regions
of the world meant to be complicit in bestiality? Perhaps the parallels should not be pushed too hard. Or perhaps these are portraits of figures who have "embraced the beast" to confront it, as we might also say that Bjørneboe himself has attempted to grapple with the little bears or "småbjørn": "Bjørneboe" would translate roughly to "bear dwelling," or the place where the bear lives.

The trilogy does not move on an upward incline, as does Dante's Commedia. Its motion is lateral, it moves over the surface of the earth geographically. Even so, it moves towards enlightenment. In this way, it bears a resemblance to that other great trilogy of a pilgrimage towards enlightenment in which the protagonist is a writer often confused with his author: Strindberg's To Damascus (Till Damaskus).

If the alpine town of Heiligenberg is taken to be the journeyer's Hell in volume one, it is interesting to note that his course is downward and southward from there. The second volume is set in south-central France, and the third is on the flatland of the desert south of the Mediterranean. Like Dante's inmates of Hell, who can see the past and future, but not the present, the narrator is obsessed with his past, and claims visionary powers ("A man like me can prophesy")--but he finds it hard to make sense of the present and the immediate past, saying he has wandered in "the Land of Chaos." The Powder House finds the narrator living in a mental hospital, in a kind of
convalescence: Strindberg, too, places a madhouse scene--set in a cloister where "the Stranger" is convalescing--precisely in the middle of To Damascus, Part I. Bjørneboe's narrator in the asylum is stronger, less dominated by depression and specters of death. It is both sanatorium and purgatory. The final book is fundamentally an apocalyptic vision. In fact, all anarchist political ideology must in the end be set to the side to make way for this book of revelations. The anagogic thrust of the book is raised a final notch in the final Nietzschean parable (190-98). It tells of a young religious disciple who wanders in the desert to see for himself the whole world's pain. No sooner does he find an answer to a dilemma, than the new answer gives rise to a new problem, and renewed horror at the world. After many years, after all his preconceptions are overthrown, after his experiences amidst the apparently senseless suffering of all life have forced him to learn only to un-learn and re-learn again--he comes home and is again able to smile like a child.
Denn wovon lebt der Mensch? Indem er stündlich
Den Menschen peinigt, auszieht, anfällt, abwürgt und frisst.
Nur dadurch lebt der Mensch, dass er so gründlich
Vergessen kann, dass er ein Mensch doch ist.

Bertolt Brecht
Die Dreigroschenoper

FOUR / ILLUSION UNMASKED:
BJÖRNEBOE AND THE THEATER

1.
Theater is the most social of the arts. Having been born out of ritual and dance, it is always a shared experience, and like all ritual is a "here and now" experience of "there and then" events. Tragedy, if we are to give Nietzsche's view the credit it still deserves, emerged from ritual. It was a resurrection of great dionysian figures, who carried the responsibility for societies of man on their shoulders. The Tragic figure looked deeply into the abyss of meaninglessness, of chaos, which society supresses from day to day life. With their ritual death died the threat of chaos into which communities, it was feared, might tumble. Comedy, on the other hand, is not an experience where spectators merge with the central figure in that kind of ritual. Comedy did, however, also emerge from dance and ritual—but it is the critical mode. Comedy
is always social in the sense that it has a role to play in improving society through the prod of its critique. It has always, according to Bergson, had the function of demonstrating how society tends to make human beings un-human. \(^3\) Whether human beings are shown as being "automatized," as Bergson says, or are turned into vulgarized figures resembling lower forms of animal life--like the Greek satyrs, or the traditional clowns known as buffoons--Comedy has always been about situations that are dehumanizing. It has always implied that there exists a possible correction to the dehumanized situation it portrays. In accordance with the notion that Comedy emerged from rituals associated with spring, the romantic form of Comedy concluded with the dehumanized losing out to the humanized: youth triumphs over age, liberation triumphs over repression, stiffened social mores give way to flexible ones, the inhumane becomes humane.

Yet Comedy often outdoes Tragedy in its grimness, in its portrayal of the dark forces at work on human beings. And sometimes, it appears to do this with significantly less compassion. Northrop Frye, who associates the different modes of the drama with different points in the cycle of seasons, sees the satiric phase of Comedy as corresponding with winter. \(^4\) In its cool detachment, which tends to disengage the emotions of an audience to better stimulate their intellect, it is capable of displays of the most extreme cruelty. In the classic comedies we find
calculated, sadistic revenge, as when Molière's Scapin savagely beats his master while he is tied up inside a bag; cynical exploitation, as when, in Le Malade imaginaire, the physicians plague and torment their willing victim with their treatments; malicious cruelty for its own sake, like that of the young hero in Machiavelli's Mandragola--whose pleasure lies not only in cuckolding the bourgeois, but by fooling his rival into plotting murder and then exposing him. The dehumanizing rack in which Chaplin's assembly-line worker is placed in the film Modern Times also comes to mind. But in almost every case, the winter leads back to spring: a better world, new hope. This is true even in that savage sub-genre satire--although its happy endings are often also ironic, or purposely contrived--as is the ending of the Beggar's Opera. Black comedy comes curiously close to Tragedy on some points--just as it can be said that autumn and winter overlap. They both often have to do with dark forces at work in human society. They both demonstrate how something has gone terribly wrong. The difference is, that in Tragedy, it is fated to be that way.

Jens Bjørneboe can be said to be the Scandinavian dramatist most influenced by Bertolt Brecht, the dramatist of distance, of "Verfremdung." His outright rejection of his own countryman, Ibsen, led him naturally in Brecht's direction. Brecht's view of Tragedy was that it was the result of a flawed premise--that Man cannot improve.
Brecht felt this could be set straight by getting rid of a flawed society. Bjørneboe would be much more likely to adopt the tragic premise. Brecht's attitude was not simply the perspective of a marxist, but that of a comedian, as has been seen already. When Bjørneboe turned to writing plays, he would adopt an essentially comic, episodic, stylized form, resembling Brecht's, but with an undercurrent of the tragic. The cool, hard form does not always hide the compassion in the intent. Even if Bjørneboe holds a particular kind of society to blame for the faults he finds, there is rarely a sense that there is any one way that the situation can be fixed. It is not that fate rules all. It is simply that man is fated to an ongoing fight with himself--and if he has the courage, much good can be done. So far, this has not been the case.

Bjørneboe set out to stage his literary assault on hierarchical society with an extroverted form of theater. He was most interested in illuminating the guardian-type, or "formyndermennesket," the word which he helped to make common usage in Norwegian, and which he described in various essays. These guardian-people are authoritarian by nature, but need not be authorities themselves--though it helps. They look upon themselves as good people, who take it upon themselves to ensure that others are just as moral as they, and that everyone will fit into society. The guardian-people are only secure if they have the sense that they are being kicked from above, while they have
someone to kick below. But in the end it is for everybody's best.

To get his critique across, the dramatist Bjørneboe would employ a style which seems to be entirely in contradiction to the method he employed in his novel trilogy, the History of Bestiality—which is narrated by the isolative, alienated figure referred to as The Servant of Justice, the keeper of the protocols. The lonely world of perception that prevails in much of his fiction is gone. Still, there is a stylistic similarity between his works of drama and fiction: a consistent and very deceptive simplicity and directness of language. Bjørneboe had come a long way from the Steinerism, metaphysics and Rilkean esthetics that dominated his thinking in the fifties. The extroverted style of his plays in the sixties and seventies was developed every step of the way with an eye toward the performance-as-event. His play Amputation (Amputasjon), with all its acrobatic surrealism, had to wait for a production from 1966 until 1970, when it was first produced by Friteatern in Stockholm. It had to wait for a style of performance that was "acrobatic/physical enough" (SS 239).

It is clear then, that Bjørneboe had to break with the Ibsen tradition which--with the very notable exception of Nordahl Grieg before the second world war--had completely dominated Norwegian theater. "Ibsen" he writes, "has become a burden, an unshakeable tombstone which preserves that form of theater over which Ibsen ruled and
therefore shall remain unchanged" (BOM 193). Of course, this could also be said of Ibsen's influence in much of Western theater today—particularly that of North America. Bjørneboe's source and resource in his break with the realistic illusion-theater was Brecht, and this is more than a simple case of influence. Still, as with all his influences from the arts and literature, his attitude toward Brecht would turn out to be anything but simple. Nevertheless many critics would justifiably continue to make the comparison with Brecht well after Bjørneboe's death.

2.
In the notes to his play Many Happy Returns (Til lykke med dagen, 1965), which was his first successful attempt at putting one of his plays on a major Norwegian stage, Bjørneboe points up the emergence of a new dramaturgy: he suggests that many of the assumed ground rules in modern dramaturgy were just as antiquated as the ancients' rules about the need for the unities of time and place. He writes, "For example, the traditional, naturalistic retro-technique in the form of conversation, which is inherited from the Greeks and brought to its high-point with Scribe and Ibsen ('Sit down and we'll say it all out!'), is a typical reflection of theater conditions which no longer hem us in today, other than in the form of
conventions and dogmas." The change is "not only owing to Brecht's epic dramaturgy" but a number of other influences as well. The laws which govern the stage are "far fewer than we tend to believe" (SS 77).

For Bjørneboe, who employs a form of music-theater in *Many Happy Returns* and *The Bird Lovers* (*Fugleelskerne*, 1966), songs should constitute a "total break with illusionistic naturalism." The songs, therefore, are almost always used as a contrast to the dramatic situations they are set in. "They don't lead the action forward, but cast a side light over it--from a point of view distant from or even contrary to the events on stage. By applying this contrast method both in the scene sequences and the use of songs, it has been attempted to intensify the statement and 'content' of the changing phases of the plot ('fabel') upon which the play builds" (77).

These statements make it fairly clear that Bjørneboe's dramaturgy in fact owes a great deal to Brecht. Furthermore, it was the encounter with Brecht's Berliner Ensemble in 1959 which led Bjørneboe, heretofore a disillusioned dramatist, back to the theater. The reason he had turned away from it in the first place, was partly due to a consistent rejection of his early scripts, which in number rivaled the rejections of his first novel, *Duke Hans*--a book that he asserted was turned down by every publisher in Norway. It was in fact after the total rejection of *Duke Hans* that he had first turned to
playwriting. His debut novel of 1952, *Before the Cock Crows* (*Før hanen galen*) about Nazi medical experiments on human beings, was written first as a play. Tone Bjørneboe, in her introduction to his collection of essays, *On Theater* (*Om Teater*, 1978) quotes from one theater's letter of rejection in 1950: "[E]ven though the theme may be current—timeless in fact—we would not be able to take it in its present form, simply because the public runs away from this kind of material" (OT 7). Later he wrote a "realistic" comedy with Strindbergian overtones which, though it was to be produced in Finland, he decided to abort. The writer had made his mark, but the dramatist was not ready to debut. His stay at the Berliner Ensemble in 1959 at the height of its reputation provided the impetus he needed. He watched the rehearsal process and came into close contact with the members of the company. This close contact with the Brechtians would lead to relationships with Wolf Kaiser, composer Hans Dieter Hosalla (who would later compose a score to *The Bird Lovers*), Manfred Wekwerth, and Carl Weber, who would eventually direct *The Bird Lovers* at the National Theater in Oslo.7

3.

Bjørneboe's book *On Brecht* (*Om Brecht*, 1977), published posthumously, certainly would seem to stand as a tribute to the master. He would also clearly have agreed with Peter
Brook's remark to the effect that all modern work in the theater can in some way be traced back to Brecht. Although theater history neither begins nor ends with Brecht, Bjørneboe insists that "its line of development goes through him." Theater work today that does not build upon, among other things, a thorough knowledge of Brecht's theory and practice will suffer lopsidedness. Even so, "Nothing would be a more false understanding and use of Brecht's works than dogmatic loyalty. Brecht worked undogmatically and experimentally...." He was willing to depart from his own theories—even to do the opposite of what he espoused (OB 14). These were the assertions Bjørneboe made in a period when he was essentially a loyal Brecht enthusiast.

Bjørneboe's translation of *Die Dreigroschenoper* is extraordinarily faithful. Fidelity, too, has its place.

The depth and precision of the work at the Berliner Ensemble, the sense of the importance of minute detail, the commitment to work all gestures, actions and moments through experimentally to their final consequences—as if in a laboratory—this had the taste of truth. The impressions of this high level of practical theater work would leave their mark on the future dramatist. "Social gest," "alienation"—the techniques of bracketing off moments when characters/performers can demonstrate how they make a free choice—all these devices are to be found written into Bjørneboe scripts. And although Bjørneboe would utilize these Brechtian techniques so useful to a
fighter in the social arena—this is so obvious that caution should be used not to ascribe his interests in Brecht solely to the political angle of Brechtian theater. His interests were clearly esthetic as well. The poet Bjørneboe, who could turn sonnets to perfection, was highly attuned to the beauty of gesture and movement, the power of the facial mask. He applies this power of observation in his essays on various European performers. In a piece on Klaus Kinski, the impact seems to come mostly from the face: "I have never seen a face so imbued with pain, and it is surely here lies the key to understanding the quality of the unfathomable, which is characteristic of his art" (OT 191). The impression made by Marcel Marceau, and that of mime in general, is evident in Bjørneboe's writing about and for the stage. Unlike Brecht, Bjørneboe is capable of writing long detailed—but hardly gratuitous—stage directions for movement, gest and gesture in his plays. In Semmelweis (1968), the greater part of Semmelweis's scenes of experimental discovery are, in the text, a decription of gesture. Attempting to discover antiseptic techniques, Semmelweis digs deeply with his bare arms into a bucket containing excrement and the carcass of a rotting cat. He attempts various washing techniques, then sniffs the air, sniffs himself, and sniffs the bucket to determine if there is a change. When he finally makes the discovery that the toilet-cleaners' chloride-of-lime eliminates the smell associated with the death epidemic in the hospitals--the
discovery is made in silence. All the more terrible it is—for it underscores the solitude of discovery. For Bjørneboe, truth is something that one always discovers alone, even in that most social of genres, the drama. Semmelweis, in silence, goes from doubt, to realization, to joy, to wild desperation. The entrance of another character into the room punctures the incredible tension of this silence.

So, although Bjørneboe's interests in theater and performance are wide and varied, Brecht's initial inspiration is undeniably vital. In his essay "Ernest Hemingway and Bertolt Brecht" he assesses the works of both writers as "healthy, invigorating", something that strengthens "the morale of the troops" (OB 130). But above all he praises them for fighting "conventions, traditions and our inclination to overlook the truth," the latter being "among the conditions which have brought us to the brink of catastrophe." He comes to a somewhat startlingly concise conclusion: "It is becoming a moral crime to maintain an illusion" (131). The anti-illusionist theater form is therefore consistent with the message of artists concerned to whatever degree with social awareness.

Nevertheless, Brecht will in the end call up a certain ambivalence. In the essay "The Defeat" (OB 132-36) Bjørneboe comes close to accusing Brecht of theft in having claimed to have written Die Tage der Commune (The Days of the Commune), when it was in fact a not very
extensive rewrite of the play *Nederlaget* (The Defeat) by the Norwegian poet and dramatist Nordahl Grieg, "one of the most significant in European drama." And though he finds Brecht's dramatization of the Paris Commune is more beautiful, Grieg's is truer (OB 134). In a "Dialectical Postscript" which has been included by the editors in *On Brecht*—actually a hand-written note left by Bjørneboe—he states that Brecht's oeuvre is, so far as thought and content go, and even his form, unoriginal:

All the thought we find in Brecht is unindependant and unoriginal. It is, in the worst sense of the word, vulgar marxist, but spiced up with a little Leninist cynicism here and there, when the whole thing threatens to get boring. One can go through Brecht's collected works—from the first to the last accessible line—and one finds not one single thought which is not borrowed, not taken from others.... Worst: Brecht lacked to a pathological degree simple humanity in everything that he wrote. (OB 122)

This reaction can be unsettling, not only because it is written by a man who considered Brecht originally to be his spiritual "brother," but also because he was translator of much Brecht poetry such as "The Infanticide Marie Farrar" ("Von der Kindesmörderin Marie Farrar"), and "To Those Who Are Born After Us" ("An die Nachgeborenen")—powerful poems that must be considered among the most significant literary appeals for compassion from the first half of this century, however bleak they may be. It cannot be a pure and simple lack of humanity in Brecht which accounts for Bjørneboe's ambivalence. It is clear, however, that Brecht's apparent
belief that one could negotiate his humanity away temporarily for certain human causes would not sit well with Bjørneboe. Brecht might on occasion perceive a need to "embrace the butcher" to change a world desperately in need of changing, but this attitude would have elicited an ironic lambasting from Bjørneboe's keeper of the protocols in the History of Bestiality. "Compassion" writes Bjørneboe, "is the most important quality in a writer—not a sentimental compassion—but an objective, exact and precise suffering-with ('med-lidelse'). This compassion represents the poet's ability to be a seer, his prophetic power." This brings Bjørneboe's thinking close to that of other contemporary dramatists, such as Edward Bond—who makes a case in Lear for what he calls human "pity," particularly among those fighting to change a society—and Tennessee Williams as well. In the case of Williams, the affinity turns out to be quite a conscious one, however much Williams's American dramaturgy was antithetical to that of the ultra-European Bjørneboe. There is evidence, though, of yet another strong influence on Bjørneboe's theoretical positions on drama and theater which is much closer to home.

For a Norwegian dramatist who, in looking for solutions to the crisis of modern drama rejected Ibsen, the pressing question is, "If not Ibsen, who then?" The first and most obvious answer was Brecht. But when Brecht's method or values are called into question, the dilemma
becomes: "If not Brecht, who now?" For Bjørneboe, only August Strindberg's insights into modern theater could compete with Brecht's. He was aware that Strindberg's insights, and his methods for transforming modern theater, were far more clear-headed and precise than his reputation would lead us to believe.  

4.

For Bjørneboe, the operetta was the first modern, decadent theater form, in the sense that it was commercial, empty, and in its time catered to the lowest common denominator in public taste. There are multiple modern parallels. It is so-called "pure entertainment." He cites Brecht's hatred for the form as well. But he adds to the list of the condemned other forms of "entertainment" such as American variety shows, light comedies and their descendants on television. This might seem at first to contradict his call in "Theater Tomorrow" ("Teater imorgen") for an entertaining theater that has "circus-like physicality" (OT 154). What concerns him is the evolution of a harmless theater which lacks art, yet is smug enough to proclaim itself as an art form. In "Theater Tomorrow," probably his most central theoretical formulation on the art of theater and performance, he condemns the tendency of mainstream theater to compete with television and film, which by way of their technical progress "have brought naturalism to its
pinnacle." Theater's attempt to outdo these media by imitating them is a trend which he considered at that time nothing short of reactionary. To reinforce this argument, he turns to Strindberg. In the essay "Strindberg, Ekman and Gründgens" (OT 127-33), he comments on Strindberg's admiration for film in the first decade of this century. It was, in its essence, a democratic art form: "low ticket prices, no coatcheck fees, equal seating, and so on. Strindberg, the spiritual aristocrat, was a democrat in social and economic questions to the last" (131). He saw no enemy to theater in film, but a separate art form. There was no need for theater to compete. Bjørneboe suggests that Strindberg saw theater's main enemy emerging from theater itself. He quotes an essay by Strindberg, which he refers to as "The Star Actor," in which the Swedish dramatist's position is remarkably close to Brecht's forty years later: "The theater's most dangerous enemy is and will be the operetta. I grew up during the operetta's day of glory, when the arch-demon Offenbach was driving humanity mad ..." (132). This contemptible genre is accused of being the hatchery of that equally contemptible and dangerous creature, the "star."

Bjørneboe shares, too, Strindberg's contempt for stage tricks, especially after his own experiences at the Berliner Ensemble (Strindberg: "The hands tore the handkerchief in pieces, while the face was smiling. Today we call that a trick.... sphinx-like smiles, artful pauses,
false exits, arm movements, flirting with the public").

The point is that learning often means forgetting old methods and old effects. And because something succeeds with a public does not at all imply that art is present. The "star" uses the winning tricks over and over. And when the public becomes so taken in by all this trickery, that through the years it cannot even see such performers aging--this is a phenomenon that Strindberg describes as "witchcraft" (133). Strindberg, too, was concerned with the negative value of sustaining petty illusions for a theater public.

If Bjørneboe took pleasure and comfort from Strindberg's contempt for stars, as well as his advocacy of committed and collective work in the theater--he also paid tribute to his moral fiber. In "Theater Tomorrow" he criticizes the Absurdists for having missed their chance at retrieving vital modern ideas which they "could only have found with Brecht," but his primary criticism is this: that though their generation had seen the evil, and the shadow the world lives under in the age after Hiroshima and Auschwitz, they lack a drive for justice "which is necessary to give a play lasting value." He somewhat bluntly traces the entire school of the Absurd to Strindberg's mummy in the closet, the scene in which a human being emerges on stage to speak and act like a parrot in The Ghost Sonata (Spöksonatén). Even if a red line can be found running from the Absurdists back to Strindberg's
inkwell, the Absurdists have also chosen to overlook his religious temperament—an unconventional religious temperament: "he believed in God as Brecht did in Lenin. They both believed in justice—here or beyond" (OT 157). Because the Theater of the Absurd lacked the drive toward justice, because it was not prepared to "break illusions"—the school of the Absurd is virtually dismissed by Bjørneboe. The Absurdists are rarely mentioned by name in his writings on theater. Only Dürrenmatt will merit high praise, as a dramatist who can transform pure intellect into "pure physicality."

Other comparisons might be drawn between Strindberg and Bjørneboe, as the latter is often a strong "presence" in his own work, not only in his fiction but in the plays as well. In Bjørneboe's novel trilogy, the History of Bestiality, the narrator seems to meld together with the author Bjørneboe, and in fact, a number of Norwegian critics have fallen into the snare of completely identifying the two. And even the play Semmelweis is dominated by a character who at times appears to live a life with so many parallels to Bjørneboe's own that many of the lines would fit well in both the mouths of the playwright and his historical character. The same has often been said of many of the principal characters in Strindberg's novels and plays--the so-called autobiographical ones--in which the various protagonists going under the names Johann, Axel, Strindberg, or the
Stranger are considered transparent masks for the author himself. Yet in any work of fiction there is a purposeful distance between the real author and the implied author—and both of these writers manipulate both that closeness and that distance to great effect in their novels. That is their art. This goes all the more for dramatic characters: For example in the case of Strindberg's protagonists in *The Father* (*Fadren*), or in *Erik XIV*, or in *To Damascus* (*Till Damaskus*), or in Bjørneboe's *Semmelweis*. If these characters are not given the autonomy from their authors they deserve, they cannot be fully created on the stage.

A striking similarity between Strindberg and Bjørneboe is apparent when one examines the way the spiritual systems they adopted affected their work. Their works, highly engaged with their own times in social and political questions, are at the same time deeply steeped in myth, Christian and pagan mythology, Greek mythology, and Jewish and Old Testament mythology and parables, so that the time-bound settings of their works seem to become special backdrops for timeless conflicts. Strindberg's spiritual "system"—comprised of elements of Theosophy, Swedenborg, Buddhism and mystic Christianity—he found to be a logical extension of his political and social views. Socialism as a doctrine was an expression of the spirit of Christianity, whether the socialists had come to admit it yet or not.\textsuperscript{12} Bjørneboe's Anthroposophy, his profound grasp of the Old
Testament and his understanding of the Gnostics, were submerged somewhat in his years of increasing engagement, but they remain only just beneath the surface in everything that he wrote. They provide an intellectual and spiritual foundation for him during the years in which he is searching for an ideology capable of responding to the urgent questions raised by the failures of the prevailing ideologies of the West: Christianity, free-market capitalism, liberalism, communism. In the sixties and seventies, Bjørneboe will attempt to breathe new life into anarchism. His methods in putting it into practice recall the great "Strindberg feud." That event, which occupied nearly all of the Swede's powers during the last three years of his life, was a European cultural and political battle of the highest order. During the "feud," Strindberg plunged once again into the social arena to attack the class system, the emerging militarism and anti-Russian chauvinism in Sweden, the press—which was engaging in hero-worship of artists who, in his view, had reduced themselves to flatterers of the powerful—and the hypocrisy of his old liberal allies in the face of all this. Bjørneboe's polemics against perceived imperialistic cold war policies of the super powers, as well as his battles with the authorities of both the education and criminal justice establishments in his own country, bear the stamp of this kind of culture feud. There is the case of the obscenity trial against him, as well as other appearances
in the docket to answer for charges he made publicly against the courts and prisons or to defend colleagues, and still further appearances and testimony to defend his work against a denigrating attack in Politiken. There were wide-ranging public debates following publication of his novels Jonas, Under a Harder Heaven and The Evil Shepherd. All these political and cultural battles might be said to be an inherited literary tradition in Scandinavia. One other important predecessor from the last century is Norway's own Hans Jaeger, a literary polemicist whose From a Christiania Bohême (Fra Kristiania Bohêmen) was confiscated by the authorities, and resulted in his imprisonment. But perhaps the greatest example of this "culture feud" tradition is that of the Strindberg feud.

In "Strindberg the Fertile" ("Strindberg-den fruktbare", 1963) Bjørneboe begins by citing the Strindberg feud. He writes of Strindberg, "His last outburst of rage assured him of the opportunity to die an unpopular man. He did not become a sacred national treasure while he lived" (BOM 190). In this essay, he sets Strindberg up against Ibsen. It becomes immediately clear that there is no contest, if one is looking for a dramatist who can still open new doors of perception in our own century--again, if it is not Brecht. Of Ibsen, he says:

Ibsen's philosophical point of departure consists of inherited moral ideals and notions about ideals--and his entire life he will think along the same lines: The world is ordered, moral, logical. He won't have it any other
way. In the same way, his whole dramaturgical and technical point of departure is inherited and traditional. He got his dramatic technique from Scribe, among others, and he has gotten the fundamental idea of the bourgeois drama, the dining room as the center of the world, from Hebbel.... Ibsen concludes and closes an epoch, a systematically ordered archive of a cosmos. When he comes to the point where reason no longer suffices, he uses a long-tested mystification technique, both scenically and philosophically: He gives a glimpse down into an irrational and Norwegian abyss, while he profoundly and ambiguously adds that God and morality are in fact down there as well; for everything has a reasonable meaning, above all those things we understand nothing about.... Heaven, Hell and the abyss must be just as well ordered as an office in police headquarters in Skien. The world order is an all embracing archive of justice. It is the bourgeois world which comes to a close with Ibsen. (BOM 192-93)

Strindberg, on the other hand, has an entirely different view of things, though his inheritance may be the same as Ibsen's. He examines, observes and describes. He is far from being as "perfect" as Ibsen, but in Bjørneboe's estimation, he uses his literary inheritance to begin things entirely new:

He gave free play to his inheritance, he took it further, he developed it. His world view is changing, it is in transformation, he contradicts himself, he changes both his content and his dramatic form; he was the first to introduce the most brutal naturalism, and he was the first to break with naturalism again. Until shortly before his death he was occupied with practical theater, with transforming theater, with experimentation. In terms of pure theatricality, Strindberg has been an inspiration, whereas Ibsen has been a burden.... (193)

Here, clearly, is a common denominator for Strindberg, Brecht--and Bjørneboe. Even if it is true that all the theatrical rules and inherited theories for writing plays
and performing on stage can be broken, there is only one rule which cannot be ignored: in words, in actions, between characters, between performers, between performers and public—everything must be struggle. Theater is not only the most social, but in this sense also the most anti-social of the arts. It is potentially the most polemical.

Bjørneboe intended to embark on a "History of Freedom" as a dialectical response to his own History of Bestiality. Much of it, this time, was to have been in the form of drama. He considered Semmelweis his first effort in that direction.14 A partially completed play on the life of American anarchist Emma Goldman was to have been pivotal: a large fragment, Red Emma (Røde Emma), has been published.15 Barely begun, this History of Freedom was to have been the story of the contribution of society's unrepentant heretics, freedom's most uncompromising partisans. But it could be said of all the plays which Bjørneboe eventually came to write, after a long self-imposed apprenticeship, in a land comparatively short of theatrical resources and not historically the most friendly place to its innovators, that they are the products of an ongoing struggle with society. They demand a response. They are studies in the art of controversy. They are links not only in an extended History of Freedom, but of a polemic of freedom.
5.
Although Brecht and Strindberg supplied Bjørneboe with what he needed by way of new forms, even together they did not fulfill all that he required of the drama. In the first place, though they were modern, they are by and large writers of the pre-nuclear age. In the new age, a sense of shared destiny must take the foreground. The case for a renewed, almost entirely new idea of compassion, must be articulated. Therefore, if not Ibsen, and if not Brecht or Strindberg—who then?

In the essay "The Jungle Behind The Night of the Iguana" ("Skogen bak Iguananatten", 1962) Bjørneboe assesses the contribution of Tennessee Williams (OT 103-10). As is often the case, the comments he makes on the figure he himself admires reflect his own struggles and goals. There are places in the essay where the parallel comes so close, that he could be writing about himself. When he writes about Williams--unlike his works on Strindberg and Brecht--all questions of esthetics, method and dramaturgy are put to the side. Content becomes the sole focus. The artist's statement, the message, is taken up like a cause. The cause, in this case, though, is not only that of the writer himself, it is the cause of the outsiders: criminals, drug addicts, misfits, heretics and outcasts that inhabit the plays of Tennessee Williams.
Remarking on Williams' early smashing success in the United States, he notes that at a certain point it seemed as if all America turned against him. The attacks came from all sides. In the media Williams was appraised as "unhealthy," "negative," "un-American"—he "rooted around in the dirt." The attack on his view of American life became so acute, writes Bjørneboe, that he finally appeared to crack, announcing that his "negative period was past" (103).

Despite this, Bjørneboe judges Night of the Iguana to have been Williams's real answer to the onslaught. He considers it, along with Orpheus Descending and Suddenly Last Summer, to be one of the American playwright's "sovereign masterpieces." Williams's fundamental theme is "cruelty in three variations": the cruelty of humanity, of nature and of God. He senses that Williams's encounter with the world has been one long breakdown—but a breakdown that has its good grounds. Williams is a post-Hiroshima and post-Auschwitz writer. On this point, Bjørneboe comes forth with a remark that encapsulates his own view of "mental health": "He who goes about today with good nerves, 'healthy' and positive, he suffers not only of a dulled intellect, but of that which is worse: a dulled heart" (104). He cites Orpheus Descending, in which the poet Val—the outsider—suffers a diabolical death at the hands of the good citizens. The play is set up with a gallery of suffering souls, too, however. For their sins they suffer even more at the hands of the people who have
"never broken down, have never been locked up, have never been out on the street, and have never seen the world—and are therefore without compassion" (106). He cites also the young woman in *Suddenly Last Summer* who moves always at the edge of the madhouse--after having escorted her wealthy poet cousin to the underdeveloped world, which he uses as inspiration to write one poem a year. His Western attitudes brought on his own death, to which she was sole witness. Bjørneboe latches onto the central metaphor of this play in particular.

If increasing numbers of people lack the compassion to stop the repeating pattern of cruelty and catastrophe, the question then becomes how to get the message across to so many hearts frozen by the Medusa called "the normal." *Night of the Iguana* contains a figure that might both provide an answer, and create some apprehension as well. The central figure here is a broken man, a priest—a defrocked priest to be sure—who in his present occupation as a tour guide takes his congregation of decent, middle-aged American ladies to the worst hell-holes in Mexico. As he leads his congregation along a path that he intends will bring them to some vision, he is in fact a very good priest. In the end, of course, he pays the price which the world often exacts from such people. Bound by force, threatened with the mental hospital, he is drawn towards oblivion in the shark infested sea. He has, according to Bjørneboe, tried to answer the questions, "How
can I overcome the world?" and, "How can I live in the world?" He has found the answer to neither (OT 108).

The questions which Bjørneboe attributes to Williams's defrocked priest are echoed throughout his work. The court official or "Servant of Justice," the narrator of Bjørneboe's novel trilogy, grapples with these questions as he moves through the terrain of Europe, creating as he does a scripture of truth. In the plays, the figure of the priest emerges in various fashions. The prison chaplain in Many Happy Returns, though he functions as one of Bjørneboe's well-meaning "guardian-types" to the point of being farcical, is likewise breaking down, and ceaselessly consuming tranquilizers. This is of course because as a member of two essentially authoritarian organizations, the Church and the prison system, he has to betray his call. In the end he asks for forgiveness in the cell of the young, hanged prisoner. Perhaps there is a built-in contradiction in being both a minister of the faith, and an imparter of vision. This priest would have to be defrocked before he could become the latter. In The Bird Lovers, it is in fact a defrocked priest who, though he originally intends to take part in the execution of former war criminals, finds himself appointed by his fellow partisans as defense counsel. He is thereby forced to launch the "court" into a challenging inquiry on the origins of evil—for those he is defending are products of an evil system, and who created that? In Semmelweis the doctor
himself is a kind of "defrocked priest." Fired as chief physician, persecuted by the authorities, he finds that his teachings on antiseptic techniques are scornfully referred to by his colleagues as a "new religion, a salvation doctrine" (SS 228).

Taking into account Bjørneboe's self-declared role as a writer, it might be said that these peculiar priests can serve as metaphors for the author and his task. The poet too must take his congregation on the pilgrimage into evil, as Virgil led Dante, and to consciousness of their own mortality, so that they will have a chance to see. One must come first to that "moment of truth" and vision, before he can really see the light of the "moment of freedom." Bjørneboe singles out a speech by Williams's priest/tour-guide which, for him, sums up the success of Tennessee Williams and his work. It is quoted here at length, since Bjørneboe indicates that it illustrates an artist's highest goals:

The whole world ... God's world has been the range of my travels. I haven't stuck to the schedules of the brochures and I've always allowed the ones that were willing to see, to see! --the underworlds of all places, and if they had hearts to be touched, feelings to feel with, I gave them a priceless chance to feel and be touched. And none will ever forget it, none of them, ever, never! (Williams 83)

Once all the questions of method and esthetics are put aside, then comes the question of values—which art itself must always come back to. Bjørneboe's mission as an artist
is encapsulated in these lines.

6.

Bjørneboe had matured as a theater thinker and essayist somewhat before he reached maturity as a playwright. This fact is in keeping with the vast majority of his undertakings, even strictly literary ones. A period of research always came first. He actually made his first attempts quite early, however, while he was still a teacher at the Steiner School in the early fifties. The first completed plays were for children, to be performed and seen by children. These short pieces were "Joseph and His Brothers" ("Joseph og hans brødre") and "Raneiro or The Candle's Flame" ("Raneiro, eller Ljuslågen"). He produced these plays with his pupils, and they have been produced again by Steiner School students in later years, but they do not form part of his collected plays. Theater, like myths, was for him at the time a means to reach children in a manner that was direct, spontaneous, a way of making them feel part of a continuous cultural heritage. "Raneiro" is of special interest, as it displays many of his early concerns, while it bears certain traits which will come to bloom during his later development as a dramatist. It is a small epic play, set partly in Italy, most notably in the Tuscany which will come to represent so much in more mature works, but it traverses the
Mediterranean. It is the story of a former warrior during the crusades, who leaves the wars to carry the flame which burns in Christ's tomb in Jerusalem all the way back to Italy. When a troubador asks the repentant fighter how one who carries a light can keep it lit, he responds: "You must have no other concern, no other happiness than the fire. Day and night the fire must be your whole life" (UMH 143).

His first serious efforts were the dramatic versions of his novels Before the Cock Crows (Før hanen galen) and The Evil Shepherd (Den Onde hyrden). Both were intended to be rather naturalistic in form, and both were eventually discarded, although the latter would eventually, after becoming a successful novel, once again supply the material for a play—this time the epic-style Many Happy Returns (Til lykke med dagen). The same fate was in store for a comedy he completed, and which was apparently offered two productions: No One Has Seen Us (Ingen har sett oss).

His successful attempts, by his own estimation, come after his encounter with the Berliner Ensemble, his immersion in Brecht's work, and his own literary investigations into theater in the early sixties.

THE PLAYS

Many Happy Returns (Til lykke med dagen, 1965) was to be
Bjørneboe's breakthrough on a major Norwegian stage. It was a complete reworking of the material from The Evil Shepherd and a series of essays which together comprise his "J'accuse" directed at the prison and legal systems. They were charged by Bjørneboe with the destruction of young lives that might have otherwise held much potential. The charges were serious, as he seized upon one specific case, that of a young prisoner who had hanged himself after the authorities had been warned by medical experts that he could not tolerate imprisonment. The charges amounted to the accusation that the authorities were killing young inmates directly. \[18\] After the novel was published, one of Norway's esteemed playwrights, Helge Krog, another fighter in the social arena, met with Bjørneboe to discuss a collaboration to put The Evil Shepherd on the stage. \[19\] Krog was ailing at the time, and died not long afterward. Only one of Krog's scenes remains in the finished version.

The story is that of a young reform-school graduate, Tonnie, who becomes a repeating offender, but nevertheless cannot tolerate imprisonment. About the time one of his friends in jail hangs himself, he himself is let out on parole. Unfortunately, things are not easy for him after having been stamped by his term in prison. He is rejected by his girlfriend, who has also been taught her lesson by the authorities, and who wants nothing more than comfort and respectability from life. He is turned down for employment. His mother, who sent him to the reformatory in
the first place years before to give herself the freedom to carry on a relationship with a man, also will not have him. Tonnie is taken in, however, by his friend Rødtopp ("Red"), a cunning dweller of the streets. Together they plan a job, which will also allow Tonnie to take his revenge on old Padda, the reform school teacher who was first to place Tonnie in isolation. After the two conspirators complete their "mugging" of Padda in his home--they toy with him cruelly, but the damage is minimal--Tonnie's girlfriend Kari plays the role of a well-adapted citizen and betrays him, professing all the while to having cared a great deal for him. Tonnie, back in his jail cell, makes the choice his mate took before him, and takes his own life—as the prison doctor had predicted.

One can wonder if there is not a trace here of an old theatrical tradition which goes back to English melodramas such as Ticket of Leave Man, in which a branded criminal cannot get a second chance. Still, there is much new in it. Its form was a total breakthrough for Norwegian theater. It is a piece of music theater, in which songs are set up to contrast and conflict with the action. The scene sequence too is contrived so that the scenes strike a contrast with each other. There is one scene that is portrayed twice, in contrasting moods. In Act I, scene 7, Tonnie finds his girl Kari, who is being kept on a tight leash by the authorities. She expresses reluctance to go
back with Tonnie. Yet the scene is full of hope, stemming from Kari's intentions to live a brighter life, to be "a decent person, with a house and a home" (SS 25). Here it is called the "Pink Scene". Later the same scene, word for word, is played again, but with a foreboding of Kari's betrayal--based upon these same personal goals she has, which formerly seemed quite normal and innocent. This time it is evident that the woman is broken, and is more loyal to the authorities and "the Joneses" than to her own need for love. The distance between them cannot be overcome. Tonnie's fury surfaces. It is now Act I, scene 10: "The Green Scene." Suddenly the dialogue gives up a Munch-like portrayal of anguish and isolation. Yet it is word for word the same as the "Pink Scene." This type of counterpoint, or contrast-method, is the thing that prevents Tragedy from seeping into the play. After Kari turns Tonnie in to the authorities, she breaks into, "O yes O yes O yes! / I'll get a kitchen yet!" (58).

Many of the songs in the play are lyrical--they are elegies of a kind. "Flowers for Genet" is one example. There is also the ritual-like "Elegie for a Hanged Bugger" ("Elegi for en hengt soper"), sung by Kari, Tonnie and his mephistophelian friend Red. The scene is the funeral of hanged prisoner 613:

We found him and we carry him
As his mother carried him before
Pure, untainted as a lamb
We found him and we have him here
Let him be grass and wind and trees
And rosehip thorns and roanberries
He was turned nineteen years, and tall
We found him behind a prison wall
All-nature, please take him in!
Our youngest brother, take care of him.

Although the figures of the Chaplain, the Prison Director and the other members of officialdom are described in a cool, classical-comic manner—an approach which Bjørneboe uses often, and which represents both some of the weakest and strongest points in his work—contradictions show in their attitudes towards the events which keep them interesting the entire way. This sense of contradiction reaches comic heights in the figure of the employer, whom the authorities are encouraging to give Tonnie work. When the Employer, a tombstone mason, is told that Tonnie has been getting training and is "very good with his hands," he reacts with astonishment: "With his hands!" The employer explains that his vocation is first and foremost that of a poet. It is his expectation that prisons should produce good poets: "And so many poets have been in prison, that a reasonable stay in prison already implies that a man is half way to being a poet ... What poets up till now haven't sat behind prison walls. I need only mention: Villon!" He goes on to name Oscar Wilde, Genet, Koestler, Dostoyevsky, Dante, Verlaine, Pound and Behan (31-32). He then sings an elegy to Behan: "At Brendan Behans Bier" ("Ved Brendan Behans Båre"). The poetic stone-cutter
finally confronts the prison director with the fact that various poets and children have been destroyed by imprisonment as well, to the director's embarrassment, ending the tirade with his remark, "I'm sorry gentlemen, I'm sorry. But you've done nothing for this young man which would have prepared him to be a stone mason" (31-34).

Another interesting study in contradiction is the tense, pill-popping prison Chaplain, whose final long monologue in Tonnie's cell, for him, is a close scrape with a deep truth: unbeknownst to him, Tonnie, to whom he is speaking, is dead. He begins with the sense that Christ, who died between thieves, is closer to Tonnie than to himself. He attempts to offer Tonnie consolation first, then asks for Tonnie's understanding of his own position, and finally, asks for forgiveness. Of course, the Chaplain's deeper understanding of the forces that are pulling him apart cannot at this late juncture change the shape of events. The priest here still has his frock on. He has his place in the hierarchical apparatus, and for a man such as he, there can be only one outcome in the choice between conscience and duty.

The Bird Lovers (Fugleelskerne, 1966) is an international play in both theme and setting, and in many ways falls squarely in the Brechtian tradition. The 1966 production at the National Theater in Oslo was partly the result of the work of Brecht collaborators.20 The
contradiction in human nature that it portrays—the thirst for justice versus the willingness to be bought for the right price—is brought to the highest point of tension before the action of the play comes to a close.

Bjørneboe's point of departure was apparently a story he had read in a local Italian newspaper.

When an association of German "bird-friends"—the nationality is in fact never named specifically, but is somewhat obvious—decides to bring their tourist trade to a small Italian village, they must first impose a ban on all hunting. As hunting fowl turns out to be the only pleasure and pastime of the poor villagers there, the prospect of having this condition imposed causes conflict among the locals. Are they willing to change their lifestyle qualitatively, so that the village can gain quantitatively in its income? Next, it is discovered that the leader of the Friends of the Birds Association, Greifenklau, and his assistant Johannes, had been in charge of the occupying power's "justice" apparatus during the war. Greifenklau was himself judge. Greifenklau and his henchman Johannes had once punished the locals for having tried to help a suspect Pole to evade torture and death. A mechanic named Caruso and his brother-in-law were executed together with the Pole—after the latter had had his eyes put out in the interrogations. Rosa, Caruso's wife, was sentenced to twenty years in prison. Caruso, however, had survived his own execution—and his living body was rescued from the
corpses at the wall by the village priest Piccolino. That is the story from the occupation years. And now, in the "present" of the drama, the resurrected Caruso and his old partisan group are once again mobilized, this time to bring the war criminals to justice. Greifenklaau, meanwhile, has become a defender of wildlife, and Johannes, the interrogator, teaches music (i.e., he teaches people to "sing"). The two humanists are kidnapped by the partisan group and put on trial.

This play also has its priest. He will be the one to bring about a reversal in the direction events are taking. Appropriately, in the "Preface" or "Prologue," in which Cavalli introduces the village and the former partisans in Torre Rosse, it is revealed that Michaelangelo Piccolino is both a former partisan and a defrocked priest:

That Franc-tireur and hunter there
Is our priest Michaelangelo
(He's been cast out of the clergy
And closed out of the sacristy
But a priest's a priest as we all know
From now unto Eternity). (SS 88)

So it is the priest, whose having been defrocked can be assumed to mean that he has been true to his ideals, who will be called upon to defend the accused, over his own protest, during the "people's trial." Piccolino's reticence is that he knows what will happen when he switches from his role as partisan to the role of defender.

For an audience, the scene is set for an execution,
not simply by the presence of a gallows, but because as early as scene 4, the villagers have reenacted their memory of the trial during the occupation. In this scene from the past—"bracketed" off in the Brechtian manner, by having the characters play a scene from the past as if it were happening in the now—it is shown that the accused are undeniably guilty. In this scene in which the villagers perform the event which dominates all their pasts, Greifenklau and Johannes appear as they were: carrying out their military duties, conducting long, demanding "interrogations"--the Pole's eyes have been put out prior to the beginning of the trial. Justice, as far as the court of the occupying power is concerned, has been carried out by the book, not even excluding a jury. Johannes is given the responsibility to deal out lashes to Caruso for contempt of court: "A pantomime-like process," say the stage directions, although "the blows can be clearly heard" (93). The whipping is juxtaposed with the judge's evaluation of the local birdsong:

JUDGE: I have never heard the nightingale sound so marvelous, so beautiful, as here. (Whipcrack)

JOHANNES (lashing): Yessir, your Honor.

JUDGE: It's like when I was a child and heard it for the first time. (Whipcrack) These great, heavenly flute melodies. (Whipcrack)

JOHANNES (lashing): Yessir, your Honor.

JUDGE: My God, it is a sacrament of beauty! (94)
The following scene, which brings the action back to the present, echoes this juxtaposition of cruelty and esthetic sensibility, this time among the Italian villagers. While some of them are discussing which forms of executions are worst, others are enthusiastically describing the ways they like their fowl prepared:

FIDELE: They jump and sprawl in the chair for several minutes, and the whole room smells of burnt flesh.

PICCOLINO: Do you roast them on a spit, Rosa?

CAVALLI: When the power is turned on, if they don't smell it themselves!

CARUSO: They are fine in the pan as well. Both with oil and butter, and sage, and a little red wine to top it off.

CAVALLI: But in the gas chamber, there they smell it. To sit in the chamber, and smell the gas coming ... (95)

A parallel between the two groups has been suggested in these back-to-back scenes. Although Greifenklau makes a reasonable case that Caruso's position as judge renders justice impossible ("The president of the court himself has been sentenced to the law's supreme punishment"), Caruso's response uses an entirely different species of logic. "I am the most qualified judge in the world," he says. "Only a man who has himself been condemned to death and shot, knows what that means. Objection overruled" (132).

Clearly, the villagers are not to be compared with their former oppressors in their pursuit of justice. But when Piccolino the priest is compelled to act as defense
counsel, this would-be executioner takes his change of roles in deadly earnest: "I make it clear that I will fulfill my duties as defense counsel to the utmost. Now I have shifted places, changed tasks. Until now, defendant number one was the murderer of my nephew and many others. From this moment on he is a human being standing alone before death" (133). He proceeds to act according to this assessment. He begins by showing both of the accused to be products of a hierarchical society that has roots before and beyond fascism. "Defendant number one," he asks, "Where have you learned that a soldier's highest duty is to obey orders?" (135). He shows that during war, the civilian population is always wrong, as they do not have power, and the governments are always right--on both sides.

Previously, the two Germans represented the power of the state, but now they are civilians--and as the partisans here represent armed power, the positions have been reversed. Despite Piccolino's arguments, the group is undaunted in their objective of finding the pair guilty. But the priest is convinced by his own arguments: "The guilty are not these men before us, but their fathers, uncles, grandparents, superiors, their people and governments.... Who was the first to say that the highest duty is loyalty to authority? When we have found the answer to that, then we're on the track of the guilty" (138). As the group continues to insist that some men are
evil, and some are good, he leads them back to mankind's very beginnings with the question: "How did evil come into the world?" The answer cannot be Lucifer. He himself was punished for being disloyal. In that case, who was evil--God, or Lucifer?

Finally, unable to convince the others as he seems to have convinced himself through relentless logic, Piccolino resorts to special maneuvers. He appeals to the self-interest of the villagers. They are now in a position to sign a highly favorable contract with their prisoner, the unrepentant Greifenklau. Piccolino is able to get a majority on his side by using the huge benefits of a tourist boom as his final argument. Greifenklau will give them the best terms, of course. The die is cast when the last hold-out standing by Caruso--the landless peasant Sandro--receives a promise from the others to contribute to a fund to help him buy land, once the money comes rolling in to their respective businesses and trades. Caruso prepares now to hang himself with the rope that had been awaiting his former tormentors. But at the end there appears a terrible riddle: Why does Caruso drop his resolve and choose to live, asking the forgiveness of his oppressors ("You whipped me and shot me.... Can you forgive me?" [149]). Up until this point, his choice has appeared to be either to carry out justice or die. Suddenly, this third choice has presented itself out of the blue to resolve his conflict. The suggestion that the
victim should ask forgiveness of his executioner has the ring of a Christian message, but not quite—since he is not forgiving his tormentor, but asking his forgiveness. And both sets of potential victims—the villagers in the past and the Germans in the present—are absolved by those who were their potential executioners. Is it perhaps that society has created the need for hangmen, and has therefore foisted its own inhumanity against man onto them? Does Caruso see his own role in this—does he speak for us all? Even this solution to the riddle is undermined by the descent of the occupation emblem—the bird of war—at the very end.

Although it may be the intention of the defrocked priest to bring his "congregation" to enlightenment, it must be said that he fails. In the end, he has to buy them off to get them to agree with his view against killing the criminals. Everyone's arguments are "right," but everyone continues to perpetrate the evil.

Yet Bjørneboe leaves the audience with something else by way of a song. The many song lyrics which are scattered through the play—"Rosa's Song," "Song of Hiroshima Town," "Mea Maxima Culpa," "The Soldiers' Song"—are rarely of the elegiac type frequently found in Many Happy Returns, tending as they do to be satires or confrontations with collective guilt. The exception is the "Song of Death" ("Dødssangen"), the reprise of which serves as the *ite missa est* of the play:
When the day has come and the hour has come
And you're put to the wall where you'll bleed upright
And those who cared for you
Long since have gone from you
Then you will see it is lonely to die!

For the day will come and the hour will come
And you'll color the sand you are standing on red
And when they come for you
Remember I told you
My brother! It's strange how it's lonely to die!

The concepts of "the moment of freedom" and "the moment of truth" from Bjørneboe's novel trilogy might cast some light on the elusive outcome of *The Bird Lovers*. In Bjørneboe's thought, the moment of truth, the individual's glimpse into his own mortality, must come before the "moment of freedom" if freedom is not to be turned into a ghastly parody of itself. For the villagers, however, the moment of freedom, in this case their economic freedom, has come before the moment of truth. Only Caruso has death-awareness: he has died and risen from the dead. It has not been imparted to the others despite the best efforts of the renegade priest. So "the Holy Ghost"--again to use a term from the trilogy--has not found its way into their consciousness or spirits. And this is the contradiction. Though Piccolino has saved human lives, the terms on which he has done it only perpetuate injustice. Caruso is abandoned by his comrades. In the end he makes the choice of a man who should be free--but one who is faced with aloneness--the ultimate most horrifying solitude
at the moment of death, abandoned by all those who shared the beliefs he has lived by. One interpretation: he joins the rest of humanity, realizing that it has cast its worst hangmen and butchers in the roles they must play. A contrary interpretation: at that impossible and terrifying moment, even the most aware of beings, with the strongest thirst for justice, can buy-in to the chicanery. Human frailty is infinitely strong.

What would the villagers have done if Piccolino had really succeeded in filling them with the "Holy Ghost", and they had acted on the basis of the moral responsibility that "the moment of truth" imparts? They would have acted in freedom. But it would have been a very different kind of freedom than that which is promised to them in this ending. If they are acting in freedom, they do not act in truth. The ending is at the same time traditional and subversive. It is the resolution of Comedy, in which everything is resolved on a note of concord, however ironic. It is also a contract that sells out all human values and notions of justice. This is how the classically comic resolution of concord is undermined. It is concord between the characters—which ends on a note which produces a conflict between the stage and the audience.  

*Semmelweis* was written during the tumultuous year of 1968, but was premiered at the Åbo Svenska Teater in Finland in 1969. The Norwegian premiere took place at the
National Theater in Oslo later that year. By that time, the excitement had already begun to make its way across the Baltic. The avowedly anti-authoritarian play was acclaimed by the authorities (in theater, that is) almost unanimously. The critical responses in Norway and Denmark to the Oslo production with Joachim Calmeyer in the gargantuan lead role, for once, also rang with enthusiasm.

The story of the Hungarian-Austrian physician, Ignaz Semmelweis, is one of the most tragic and simultaneously revealing episodes from the annals of modern science and medicine. Bjørneboe's *Semmelweis*—much like Brecht's *Galileo*—is a story that shows the pitfalls and even horrors that await the man of science, who is genuinely in search of truth and improvement of the human condition, in a society that reveres authority and its world-view above all else. Today hailed as the founder of modern antiseptic techniques, Semmelweis was in his time fired from his position at Vienna General Hospital, ridiculed by his colleagues, hounded by the authorities and the police, his works and experimental results banned. He was finally driven into exile back to Hungary. He took part in the revolt of 1848 against Hapsburg absolutism, which did not ingratiate him with many of his colleagues, and with the political authorities even less. The facts point to a collaboration between the medical authorities, themselves a powerful professional and political lobby in the Hapsburg empire, and the political authorities. The conspiracy to
silence Semmelweis was due to his discovery and stubborn insistence that tens of thousands of pregnant women were being killed throughout Europe each year by the dreaded child-bed fever (now known as puerperal fever) because doctors and students were not washing their hands. The worst epidemics appeared where medical students went directly from autopsies in the morgue to the obstetrics wards where they examined pregnant mothers. Although Semmelweis had demonstrated that the mortality rate could be eliminated entirely by washing with chloride-of-lime between procedures, the fact that he had gotten the chloride method from the Vienna toilet cleaners only increased the ridicule by his enemies. Due to the suppression of his statistics and method, his exile to Hungary, and the silence imposed on him by the growing repression of the Austro-Hungarian authorities, his attempts to get the truth out made him appear increasingly mad. Semmelweis, who began as a promising prodigy and a young idealist, in the play becomes a gray, dottering old man before our eyes—before he reaches middle age. After twenty years pass, and he has struggled hopelessly while perhaps hundreds of thousands of women have died unnecessarily, his "madness" becomes a fact. He himself dies of the disease which he fought, supposedly a "specifically female illness," after cutting his finger in an autopsy.

As often is the case in Bjørneboe's work, disease is
also a metaphor for the prevailing consciousness of an age. The "doctors are the disease" here—and so is the hierarchical form of society of which they are a part. Meanwhile, anyone who pursues the truth is "sick," but in a much different sense. He is not part of the prevailing disease, hence he is abnormal. This does not mean, though, that the disease in society does not take its toll on those who are uncompromising in their fight against the disease.

After Semmelweis reads his "Open letter to the physicians of Europe" to his wife and his companion Markusovszky, he suddenly shows how the invisible enemy, the disease of hierarchy and nepotism, is indeed taking its toll on a man who refuses to be infected:

And to this the doctors of Europe reply that they loyally adhere to the great Virchow—the mass murderer! They collectively dissociate themselves from the chloride prophet Semmelweis, from the mad prophet of septic virus. And they go on murdering. They blindly follow at the coattails of their feeble-minded Pope Virchow the Mighty! They murder blindly and loyally—faithful as bloodhounds—faithful as the Russian police—one woman after the other—hundreds of thousands—it's all nothing but blood and pus and sewage and toxins and murder. They kill and kill ... (He takes hold of Marko's arm) ... I see nothing but dead women, Marko ... why don't they listen to me? I dream of dead women every night ... and of the secret police....

Markusovszky remarks that Semmelweis is now proceeding in a way that is killing him, not his enemies (230). This side of the story, the personal tragedy of the romantic who was unwilling to compromise with a world which hates innocence and goodness, who refused to be a diplomat where the truth
was concerned, was emphasized in Céline's early book on Semmelweis, actually his medical dissertation—the only literary recounting of Semmelweis's life before Bjørneboe's play.  

**Semmelweis** is a play that is, despite all of the above, full of life, and spry black humor. The early scene which recreates the conference of the College of Physicians—convened to investigate the mortality rate of the hospital—would almost seem to be the commentary of an Absurdist on scientific jargon and other forms of professional hocus-pocus. The bordello scenes are lusty, and full of irony in the way they reflect on the play as a whole: Semmelweis gets his first "washing" lesson from the whore Sophie—for whom survival requires cleanliness. Semmelweis's encounter with the Goldoni theater troupe in Venice is painted in garish Fellini-like colors—with masked actors, drunkenness on the piazza, opera parody, and with the sense of the grotesque pumped up by continuing imagery of disease and decay. One of the alienation effects the script calls for is reminiscent of some of Strindberg's witty theatrical devices in his dream plays. In the "Prologue in the Auditorium," a rector is reading a tribute to Semmelweis, as the public is supposedly witnessing the unveiling of a new statue to medicine's dead, but great, hero (161). The statue Semmelweis will follow the character Semmelweis from scene to scene, set in different periods of his life. Those acquainted with
Strindberg's *A Dream Play* (*Ett Drömspel*), would be quickly reminded of the mobile door, which appears everywhere during Indra's Daughter's quest on planet earth. It is also reminiscent of the screens in Genet's *Les Paravents*, objects which are so active in that play as to become agents of the dramatic action. In the bordello scene in *Semmelweis* the young Semmelweis hangs up his clothes on his own monument. In Venice, he embraces it in an ecstatic stupor. It is a highly sensuous play, with much eating and drinking and pleasure—as well as pus, blood-spattered smocks and buckets of excrement.

Many of the peculiar features of the play have to do with the period in which it came into being. It was written in 1968, during a time when political upheavals were taking place across Europe, spreading over international borders, in both Eastern and Western Europe. From Paris to Prague, from Lisbon to Belgrade, from Poznan to Berlin, young students and often workers had taken to the streets. More often than not, one of the things that provoked them was their own governments' complicity with great powers who were seen to be trampling on the rights of peoples of less powerful countries—be it Greece or Czechoslovakia or Vietnam. The enemy was seen to be sclerotic systems, which were becoming more of a menace as hardening was setting in. In the long and short run, some of these revolts led to changes in a number of governments, for better or for worse. In many cases, the immediate
result was an open show of force by the oppressive apparatus of the state—which was laid bare even in countries practicing different degrees of democracy. At the same time, the upheaval took the form of a revolution in culture, aimed at debunking inherited cultural norms. Theaters in Paris, for example, had been occupied in the name of the "martyr" of the new theater, Antonin Artaud. It is against this backdrop that Bjørneboe completed his first major work that can be said, indisputably, to have been written from the perspective of his anarchism, though its influence may be found, to varying degrees, in prior works. This also provides the explanation for the "Prologue in the Theater" which was not used for the Norwegian premiere, but which has been used elsewhere—most notably in the Norwegian Television Theater production in 1983. Bjørneboe had sent the script to his old collaborator Eugenio Barba, director of Odin Teatret. It seems it was Barba who suggested that a frame be created in which students or rebels of some sort would occupy the theater in order to put on the play Semmelweis. Bjørneboe took the advice, and responded to Barba with the following letter:

Grandissimo escataloge
ed Apocalypiticus!

Thank you for your last documents. You will laugh, when you see the final version of Semmelweis: It makes use of almost all of your suggestions.... I have done my utmost now—and hopefully I have succeeded in making the play absolutely unplayable in every normal bourgeois theater.
In any case, the play shouldn't be produced. It was bad enough to have to write it, without also having to go through all the sorrow, vexation and garbage that a premiere brings with it.... (OT 14)

The idea was that the performance should begin with an assault of disenchanted young people on the stage. They would announce: "Instead of tonight's stupid, idiotic operetta, you will be seeing a play about authority and anti-authority" (SS 161).

As Semmelweis was in fact begun, its formative drafts in any case, in 1967, the year in which Bjørneboe was also standing trial accused of "obscenity" for his novel Without a Stitch (Uten en tråd), it is not hard to understand why a good deal of Bjørneboe himself might seem to be present in the provocative and unrepentant figure of Semmelweis. He was becoming increasingly convinced at this time that it was impossibly difficult for those who did not hate authoritarianism to accept that all "truly creative people are problem children" as he wrote in his letters to the Swedish actor Allan Edwall—for whom he had modeled the role of Semmelweis—during the trial. Though it is true that such "problem children" are often regarded as heroic figures by posterity, as was the case with Semmelweis, one can also invoke the words of Galileo in Brecht's play: "Pity the land that needs heroes."

S

Semmelweis is anti-psychological in its style, "Something," he writes in the letter to Edwall, "that Nordic theater people find indescribably difficult to
comprehend." But Bjørneboe takes the anti-psychological here to a point that goes beyond Brecht, and even most classical drama, which qualifies as non-psychological drama in the sense that Bjørneboe means. The conflict in the play is only rarely between individuals. It is a dramaturgical problem child, inasmuch as it plays out an ongoing conflict between one man and a class of men. Even Semmelweis's individual battles with that quintessential proto-totalitarian from Austro-Hungarian times, Professor Doktor Klein, are imbued with the sense of a conflict with a class, a group, a political and social force. It may seem just short of impossible that this kind of conflict can be shown on the stage. Yet to claim that this use of epic theater is without precedent would be to exaggerate. It can be found almost 100 years earlier in a play where the life story of another chaotic and rebellious individual is portrayed as ongoing conflict with forces of society and existence that are greater than he: Peer Gynt. And similarly, the ruthless seeker after truth can be found in Brand, Ibsen's only other truly epic play. Ibsen's influence is apparent here, though unacknowledged, and it is quite plausible that this influence is entirely unconscious. Without leaving the realm of Scandinavian drama, which Bjørneboe so severely chastises for being in the thrall of realistic-illusion theater, another clear precedent can be found. The Stranger in Strindberg's epic trilogy To Damascus (Till Damaskus) is a character that has
been so connected with his author that the actors performing "Den Okända," the hero of the drama, have often been directed to play Strindberg. And here too, the protagonist is up against forces that cannot be identified with an individual or a few individuals. They are forces. Semmelweis's opponents are nonrealistic, Kafka-esque bureaucrats, whose influence is so widespread that his efforts begin to seem as pointless and as endless as those of that other hapless Austro-Hungarian subject, Josef K. Added to the list might be Camus's Doctor Rieux, whose enemy, the plague, is virtually an abstraction. As was the case with Brecht's Galileo, Semmelweis's scientific efforts will win out in the end, but not the man—not before he is destroyed by the conflict between the hierarchy and his own dangerous sense of compassion and unquenchable desire to bring the truth to light. Compassion and truth, once again, cannot exist, the one without the other. In his speech to Markusovszky above, it is striking just how insane the conflict is—this combat with nameless, faceless enemies. This is the secret of the dramatic conflict sometimes called "Kafka-esque": one of the partners in the conflict is everywhere and nowhere at once. It is a bureaucracy of enemies. It is impossible to find the point where "the buck stops"—as in K's fruitless search for Klam in The Castle. During the more than twenty-year span of Semmelweis's story, he has not only to prove he is right. He must tag a face or a name on his
enemy.

Whereas Brecht's Galileo has the wily, self-preservation instinct of all of Brecht's most convincing characters, Semmelweis lacks it. He is uncompromising, even from the perspective of enlightened self-interest. Whereas Galileo will relent after being shown the implements of torture, an already broken, mentally tormented Semmelweis is still attempting to plaster the streets with posters to get his teachings out. Both Semmelweis and Galileo were figures who managed to get the truth out—truths whose time had come. Yet these two characters are the antitheses of each other. Galileo may well be a character whose caution, scientific approach, fascination with truth, and canny survival instinct bring him closest of all Brecht's characters to Brecht himself. In the same way, Semmelweis's inability to put compassion aside, his anger, outrage, the non-negotiability of his humanity, his inability to live with injustice, all this brings him closest of all the characters of his plays to Bjørneboe himself. They are both biographies written in lieu of autobiographies. Céline, whose biographical treatment of Semmelweis's life is not specifically acknowledged in Bjørneboe's notes or correspondence concerning the play, described him as a Romantic, a man without "diplomacy," or the ability to accommodate himself enough to contrived norms and manners to be able to negotiate. Céline's Semmelweis is a man whose downfall was
his faith in the potential goodness of his fellow men, in a
world that is essentially treacherous. 24 Bjørneboe's
Semmelweis, as a man who takes upon himself the sufferings
of many other human beings, is tormented by that biblical
question which Bjørneboe saw Tennessee William's defrocked
priest confronting: "How can I overcome the world?" (OT
108). Semmelweis is on his way to an answer. The play
takes Bjørneboe in the direction he hoped to go once he
completed his History of Bestiality five years later in
1973. Much of his planned "History of Freedom" was to have
been written in dramatic form. Semmelweis brought him to
the threshold.

In a brief foreword to Amputation (Amputasjon, 1970)
Bjørneboe explains that though the play existed in the form
of a draft six or seven years prior to its first
production, he "hadn't counted, at that time, on finding a
theater with a style of performance which would make
possible a production that was acrobatic/physical enough to
match the style of the play" (SS 241). The revolution in
performance techniques in the sixties--with the convergence
of the influences of Brecht and Artaud met with that of
Grotowsky--made the venture possible. The production by
Friteatern, then associated with the national touring
company Svenska Riksteatern, under the direction of Martha
Vestin, was a 1 1/2 hour long one-act play, the performance
of which has been described as bordering on pure
surrealism. The language itself is direct, one-dimensional, often fierce, violent, and the characters are made to order for those skilled in playing caricature. Once again the play opens in a variation of the university lecture hall. This time it is an "arena"--a medical school operating theater. It is set in a society of the not to distant future, in the "University Clinic's Social Pathology Institute," where the public is confronted with a dissection table, crude surgical technology, and the two lecturers for the evening: Supreme Court Surgeon Prof. Dr. Fortinbras (whose nationality seems obvious), and Social Surgeon Prof. Dr. Vivaldi from Minsk (slightly more confusing perhaps, but the point is made). The "medical" question at hand is how best to normalize people who do not fit into a well ordered society. Vivaldi and Fortinbras have two contradictory teachings on the correction of deviance. Fortinbras claims to achieve success through manipulation of the endocrine system, i.e., gland transplants. Vivaldi insists that one must drill into the cerebral cortex. His theory is strictly anatomical. Like a couple of red clowns in Hell--or like the Marx Brothers in the age of technology--they keep up their theoretical debate as they go to work on some exemplary experimental subjects, with the assistance of medical personnel who should probably be described as henchmen. However, this action in the present is broken by flash-back scenes in which the staff and patients show how they learned, or were
taught, to "fit" and to serve their society. These bracketed reenactments of the past contain exaggerated, semi-acrobatic scenes of humiliation, torture and forced self-denial. The "patients" too, reenact their past, in which their criminal conduct in love affairs, or their desire to be alone, were discovered in time by the police. Unfortunately, the cure for these problems by social means has not taken hold. For one patient, it is his anti-social tendencies which are the symptoms that give him away. For another, it is an unfortunate outburst of compassion as she is sitting amidst the spectators in the lecture hall.

Vivaldi and Fortinbras go on with their competition— which culminates in a high speed race involving skull-borings and amputations, in which parts of patients disappear under the sheets, there are sounds of sawing, of limbs falling into buckets— until Fortinbras stops long enough to note the patient's condition: "He's not breathing." To this his competitor responds, "Is it absolutely necessary that he breathe?" (SS 284).

In this instance, Bjørneboe's meeting with reality attains such a pitch of Swiftian satire that it has veered into the surreal. The purposeful two-dimensionality of the dialogue, matched with the finely timed movement and acrobatics which the script calls for, turns the play into a razor edged boomerang. For the public, the impulse is to duck.
The Case of Torgersen (Tilfellet Torgersen, 1973) is a docu-drama. Bjørneboe himself had at first thought Frederik Fasting Torgersen to be guilty of a combined rape-murder which occurred in Oslo in 1957. The conduct of the trial had made it a cause célèbre at the time, inasmuch as the State Prosecutor's office, the press, and therefore the public consensus had all declared Torgersen guilty in advance--because of a supposed "past" and incidents of which he was most probably not guilty. There had been constant references in court and in the press to an episode of "necrophilia," based upon a rumor that had been circulated about this Oslo "outsider," but for which charges had never been laid. There had, however, been an earlier rape charge on which he had been found guilty based on highly dubious evidence. As Bjørneboe worked with the material, he came to the conclusion that there had not been a shred of substantial evidence that Torgersen was guilty of the latter charge. Already Torgersen had spent fifteen years in jail--the longest term in Norway's post-war period. It was clear that the prestige of the State's Prosecutor's office had been at stake in the case. Torgersen had been bluntly declared guilty by a number of the Prosecutor's expert witnesses, although they admitted when pressed that at least a reasonable doubt existed in regard to all the scientific evidence. The "conclusive" evidence had been the testimony of a repeating offender and known prison informer, who could not have seen Torgersen at
the site of the crime as he claimed. There was also the testimony of a so-called forensic dentist who testified that he had found teethmarks of the accused on the victim's breast. This expert had also claimed to have developed his trade into a refined science, after having examined twenty-five human bites for the police, although only one--this one--had been in human flesh.

At the time of the trial the public mood was near hysteria, and most everybody wanted the "necrophiliac" put away. He should never be "set loose on society again," said Prosecutor Dorenfeldt, Bjørneboe's perennial opponent (SS 359). Among other things, the prosecution showed that Torgersen was an idler, as he painted pictures and wrote poetry, which two "expert" witnesses, psychiatrists, testified were artistic failures.

Once again, Bjørneboe was engaged with the court system and the Prosecutor's office. Once again his theme was an expose of the "conspiracy of baboon elders": a concept from Lorenz's book On Aggression, in which baboon elders learn to combine their forces against the weak to maintain their power and prestige (OT 51). After Torgersen had spent fifteen years in prison, several of them in solitary, his trial was itself put on trial on an Oslo stage, and later on the Television theater. The case was not taken up again, as various attorneys had desired (Wandrup 98). Torgersen was soon set free, however, thereby avoiding the necessity of a new trial. Bjørneboe
had only reassembled the statements made in court, and in the press, and reexamined the evidence publicly. His adaptation of documentary material was sufficient to change public consciousness around the affair. The dramatic techniques employed are perhaps not so different from Peter Weiss's approach to the material from the Auschwitz trial in his oratorio *Die Ermittlung (The Investigation)*, though the dimensions of Weiss's material are vaster by far.

Until the end of his career, the courtroom and the trial were closely associated with the act of writing itself—especially as regards the drama. In a letter he wrote to Allan Edwall (8 May 1967) during his own trial concerning his banned novel, he had expressed the fear that the legal authorities were "preparing an execution, not a trial":

But it has its bright side: for a dramatist there is always something of a purely technical, dramaturgical nature in a trial.---The case, the procedure reflect the ancient origins of the drama. All trials are performable plays, and every play is, spiritually speaking, a trial, a struggle to uncover the truth. (OT 49)

*Dungaree (Dongery 1974)*, a collage play concerning business and marketing, was Bjørneboe's last performed dramatic effort. The vignettes are set up in a review format, with a collection of satirical songs. It provided sufficient material for a cabaret-style production at Oslo's Club 7, but it lacked the impact of the other plays.
Unlike Brecht, Bjørneboe would never succeed in putting economics on the stage—though he is one of the very few who have tried. Still, he managed to demonstrate with wry humor how needs and demand are created by the experts in marketing, rather than the prevailing myth that the marketing industry would have the public believe: that the needs create the market.

8.
In reviewing all of Bjørneboe's plays it becomes clear that, though he employs many classically comic techniques in his theater—all the techniques of distancing and intellect which have been touched upon in the earlier discussions of the ideas of Bergson and Brecht—the plays do not end on the note of hope, be it sincere or ironic, which the different forms of Comedy tend to have. Hopeful resolutions are not to be found in any of these plays. The resolution, the hope and need for resolution, is thrown back upon the public. For in the plays, rather than liberation triumphing over oppression, or humanity over dehumanization—or automatization, to use Bergson's term—the audience is left with the idea that there is a malignant force at work in the world, often described by the metaphor of disease. The idea of a disease in society that has not been eradicated brings the work closer to the premise of Tragedy, as well as the sense of the absurd
found in Camus. This can readily be seen in the Greek theater: *Oedipus* begins with an appeal from the citizens of Thebes, whose land has been blighted, and the cure rests on the shoulders of the king. Semmelweis almost fits the pattern of this "dionysian" type, in that he is a figure who by all rights should bear up a whole society on his shoulders. Despite Bjørneboe's anarchism, Semmelweis is no nihilist. He is a social man without being socialized. He bears up the values of an unrealized just society against the onslaught of the unjust, old society. Of course, by now, history has completely redeemed Semmelweis and his ideas. That is why the word redemption is so frequently used as a religious term: it does not happen in "this life." Neither does justice come about in these plays. Redemption and justice come after the play--after the moment of truth. What the audience is to be left with is not despair, but the comic resolution. It is theirs, if they so will it.

It is the public who will use their freedom as they see fit, and to create resolutions. It is the poet's task to impart--like the priest without a frock that he is--the truth first.
And yet is not mankind itself, pushing on its blind way, driven by a dream of its greatness and its power upon the dark paths of excessive cruelty and of excessive devotion?

Joseph Conrad
Lord Jim

... la négation de tout est une servitude et la vraie liberté une soumission intérieure à une valeur qui fait face à l'histoire et ses succès.

Albert Camus
L'homme révolté

FIVE / LAST WORKS: CONCLUSIONS

1.

Jens Bjørneboe never wholly adopted any cut-and-dried ideology, though it is by no means certain that he was not vigorously in search of one at times. From the mid 1960s onward, when attempting to put his own political thought into a framework, the framework was that of anarchism. However much he becomes anarchism's advocate, and however much he in fact comes to wear the label of anarchist in his own country as he moves on his perplexing trajectory from mystic conservatism to libertarian socialism, it must be acknowledged that as a flexible ideology and a minimally unified movement, anarchism provides the golden opportunity for an artist to be both engaged and independent. It was eminently suited to a disposition like Bjørneboe's. The
reasons for his adoption of this particular ideology, needless to say, go deeper than that.

His anarchism, in terms of theory, is received from Kropotkin, its "most consistent and clearest theoretician," particularly in light of Kropotkin's prophecies about what would become of both social democracy and communism as vanguards of Europe's working class (VEA 180). If Kropotkin provides the theory, it is the life of Emma Goldman, her persistence, and her campaign against both the oppression of capitalism and of the emerging authoritarian left, which provided the exemplary form of practice. It was the martyrdom of August Spies and the sacrifice of the Haymarket martyrs of Chicago—who took their executions in triumph—which is the historical moment that serves as inspiration. It was the persistence of society's heretics which Bjørneboe hoped would form the basis for the History of Freedom, and after the History of Bestiality, figures such as these stood waiting in the wings, ready to enter into his new mammoth project. Lest it be forgotten, Norway itself had contributed a figure to this pantheon. This daemonic figure, whose shadow still lives in that northern capital—where he once wandered in the heat of his passions through the arctic snowstorms and the bourgeois ambience of the square on Carl Johann to hold court in the Kristiania Bohème—was an unrepentant anarchist, yet so isolated from the mainstream movement in the rest of Europe that Prince Kropotkin did not bother to answer his letters: Hans
Jaeger. Here was a literary anarchist who had lived as a man pledged to break with his past, to break with the values of his society, to write his own life and to take that life—though he did not directly fulfill the last pledge. For Bjørneboe, there was special meaning in a life lived in that way. It was from Jaeger that Bjørneboe took the resonating phrase, "mankind's meeting with itself," which he revived in his 1955 article, "Hans Jaeger" (POA 121-31). Perhaps it can be said that Bjørneboe's choice of ideology did have the momentum of a kind of national tradition behind it.

Anarchism was by the 1960s an international movement that had come to the brink of extinction because of its very insistence upon facing off with all forms of oppression. Among the political movements of the sixties anarchist thought had a revival. It was a time when alternatives had to be found if the powerful, all-embracing system of thought called Marxism-Leninism was not to run away with all legitimate expressions of resistance and rebellion. It left traces throughout Europe after 1968, in the form of the demand for self-management, auto-gestion, which became an eventual goal of the abortive "Revolution of the Carnations" in Portugal, as well as of the later Solidarity movement in Poland, and the "Greens" in Western Europe. Bjørneboe's definition of anarchism for this reason is classic, not iconoclastic, as he sets it down in the 1969 essay, "Anarchism as a Future" ("Anarkismen som
He remarks there that many different collective and individual tendencies exist in anarchism:

but all of these tendencies are bound by the one central point, which is the core of anarchism: the dissolving or dismantling of the centralized state, of authoritarian state power. The vertical, pyramidal, or better said—monolithic—type of state shall be replaced by a horizontal society, divided up into free, independent communities or federations—into sovereign, but collaborating labor unions. It is the opinion of the anarchists that only the dissolution of the central constellations of power, be it of the political or economic variety, will make it possible to create a socialist society which insures the individual that freedom and human worth which are the prerequisites for a fruitful and creative human life. (VEA 81)

In this classical formulation—which is perhaps not so classical that it has not been adopted by movements like those mentioned above in our own time—Bjørneboe retains an element in his anarchism which keeps him at arm's length from purely destructive movements such as Nihilism, which many, and even Bjørneboe himself, have confused with anarchism (POA 45). In defiance of the strictly materialist view of most radical thought of the current epoch, he will consciously speak of "spiritual freedom." There must be a transcendent element: that is, something greater than necessity, or the demands of history. Rather than seeing one fixed goal at the end of history, actions in the present must have their own intrinsic value. There is no one fixed goal of history, but a process which only spiritual freedom can nurture. Bjørneboe writes in "Anarchism—Today?" ("Anarkismen--idag?" 1971) that
"Freedom is neither caviar for the intellectual nor opium for a bourgeois minority." He sees it as the "absolutely essential foundation for any society capable of development" (POA 48). At the present stage of history, any society refusing to acknowledge this element will degenerate with time. He writes that "living transformation, development and growth are not possible without swallowing the bitter pill which is today the disdained and denigrated spiritual freedom." The essay culminates in the reminder that "state" and "process" are antithetical terms:

All centralized power contains within it the tendency toward evil, toward the stiffened, the reactionary, the tendency to status quo as the best of all things—toward "the static". It is both interesting and instructive to take note of the fact that the adjective "static" is derived from the same root as "state"—as "status." The very concept of the State is the quintessence of the static, the congealed, the dead. (POA 48)

Kaj Skagen, one of the most prominent of Bjørneboe's one-time disciples, has attempted to capture the "difference" in Bjørneboe's politics by describing them with the contradiction "social-individualism." Skagen himself feels that the contradiction is a false one, and emphasizes the dynamics behind Bjørneboe's attack on prisons: "The motive was defense for the individual, the actions taken were social, and the consequences utterly political; it all hung together" (Skagen 80). Still, social action motivated by individualism has never been a
guarantee of either the highest ends or the worthiest means—otherwise various dictatorships, powerful corporate figures, the mafia or even certain fascists would qualify as "social-individualists." There is another facet to Bjørneboe's growing spirit of revolt, which in fact turns away from the main currents of rebellion in the West during the last one hundred years. This facet reflects a small emerging body of contemporary thought which reevaluates rebellion—both its origins as a distinctly human impulse, and the distorted forms it has taken in modern times. It would be helpful, at this point, to take some time to examine the thought of one writer who is the central "revisionist" of the idea of rebellion during the post-war period.

2. Albert Camus published L'Homme revolte in 1951, as Bjørneboe was emerging with his first published pieces. In it Camus postulates that the original impulse of rebellion is part of a human drive toward justice that results from a response to specific forms of master/slave relationships where they are found in the world, as well as a response to the injustice of existence itself. The rebel, writes Camus, "opposes the principle of justice which he finds in himself, to the principle of injustice which he sees being applied in the world." For Camus, there is a
metaphysical rebellion which is of equal weight with manifestations of rebellion on the political plane:

Metaphysical rebellion is a claim, motivated by the concept of a complete unity, against the suffering of life and death and a protest against the human condition both for its incompleteness, thanks to death, and its wastefulness, thanks to evil. (24)

By carefully plotting out the chain of events in the history of ideas from the Enlightenment through the twentieth century, Camus shows how the impulse toward rebellion has been exacerbated by modern developments, and also derailed, manipulated, rechanneled into the idea of revolution as we have come to understand it: first, the revolt of the Enlightenment turns away from the dogma based on the assumption of the existence of God to values based on the notion of "nature." The initial question raised by rebellion in this period, says Camus, is the following: "Is it possible to find a rule of conduct outside the realm of religion and its absolute values?" (21). The Romantics take the disavowal of God a step further: if God is to be held responsible for this world and thus the injustice present in this world, then God is not a neutral concept--he is the enemy. Milton's Lucifer has been misunderstood. It is time, said the Romantics, to go to the attack--to blaspheme. All that humankind has inherited by way of values--goes the logic--is worse than useless. It serves injustice. The Romantics embrace the devil.
During the same epoch the Jacobins slay God as well, and concretely in the form of the king, in the hope that casting off all received values will serve the revolution. The one redeeming feature of Saint Just, in Camus's eyes, is that there remains for the lawyer who was the guillotine's greatest advocate, a secular divinity. Justice and Reason are raised to the level of the divine. The downfall of the Jacobins can be found in their idea that all values can be thrown aside for the paradise of justice that will emerge on earth—a distant goal. It is the beginning of the ends-justify-the-means argument. The German ideology which is born with Hegel casts off all notions of anything transcendent which might guide the struggles of humankind. Hegel assumes the aristocracy as a class will see its end. It is, however, to be replaced by nothing more than an "Aristocracy of Success." The dialectic drives history onward towards an abstract ideal which is always postponed until some distant future date. What happens to human beings in society until that time is a matter of indifference. Principles and values are meaningless when history needs to be driven forward to an increasingly distant goal that is all embracing: toward "totality." The Russian Nihilists embrace the German ideology and this particular Hegelian idea of negation with a vengeance. The world is unjust—therefore destruction is valid in every case. There are no values of any kind, period. Nietzsche, during the same time, acknowledges the
death of God. Concerned that man evolve rather than self-destruct, he advocates the transvaluation of values. This is not simply the negation of values—and this is the great difference with Nietzsche, Camus reminds us. He is for the creation of new values based upon life and not imposed arbitrarily by any sort of church—be it spiritual or secular. Nietzsche, according to Camus, makes the mistake of positing for the sake of hypothesis the possibility that all moral constraints be broken. His brief lapse into this hypothetical proposition was to be taken quite literally in this, the most literal-minded of all centuries, by one movement of mischanneled rebellion among his countrymen which denied all values.

When it comes to terrorism as a tactic, Camus is repelled, not like Lenin by the inefficacy of the tactic, but by its defiance of the possibility that values can exist. His respect, however, is reserved for the anarchists of the Social Revolutionaries in Russia, who saw to it that their targets were specific agents of tyranny—and who expected their own lives to be sacrificed as part of the act of violence: either immediately, or later. It is the confrontation with their own death and their anticipation of the gallows which legitimized the extremity of their actions. While Bakunin at one point allowed himself to be seduced into a program of destruction without moral restraint, Camus suggests his followers in these cases "corrected their master and demonstrated,
contrary to his teaching, that one kind of aristocracy, at least, is superior to the calculating aristocracy of success exalted by Hegel: the aristocracy of sacrifice" (168). Their actions, it is true, could only have been carried out by rejecting dominant values in the society in which they lived, though they were carried out in accordance with values created in the confrontation with mortality. It is in this death awareness—this "moment of truth," to use the language of Jens Bjørneboe—that the new values are born.

Marxism, according to Camus, came to deny the existence of values and principles, other than the value in those things which would contribute to the revolution and the city of man at some future point. Worse, Marx's own dialectical view of history is completely ignored by his followers, who think that history itself will at some point come to an end when all classes are abolished. Lenin, although hardly envisioning the totalitarianism he played midwife to, is utterly ruthless in advocating the shunting aside of all values other than those which lead to revolution. He is a quintessential spokesman of nihilism, in that the priority is to create the machinery to destroy the enemy in all corners of the globe so that a final day of justice can arrive. During Lenin's time that "final day"—i.e., the accomplishment of communism—was pushed off from a few years in the future to a vague estimate of decades and centuries. Everything is good that serves the
ends, no matter how cruel, no matter what the cost in human life and rights. The transcendent element is now entirely missing in this modern form of revolt, and only the faith in the ends, the new paradise in a new afterlife on planet earth itself remains. Rebellion is redirected into making a world for the new masters who will ruthlessly crush as apostates any who express the now forgotten original human impulse toward justice—which is the original idea of rebellion.

Camus concludes from this: "Those who have chosen to kill, and those who have chosen to enslave, will successively occupy the front of the stage in the name of a form of rebellion which has been diverted from the path of truth" (148).

Bjørneboe was wont to cite Sartre rather than Camus when making reference to existentialism and existentialist thought. The fact of the matter is that his own thought is by far closer to that of Camus: remarkably close. Nowhere does this come clear more vividly than in the extraordinary essay by Camus in which the growth of the impulse of rebellion is shown to be the motivating force behind politics, society, culture and art—the most creative as well as the most destructive developments. Though as a philosophical work the perspective of L'Homme revolté on the dilemma of man is that of existentialism, and of the "absurd," as political thought it is almost indisputably a work in the tradition of anarchism. The
features Bjørneboe and Camus have in common can be spotted without undue effort. In Bjørneboe, we find that humanity has come to its "moment of freedom" without having faced its "moment of truth." That is, we have become aware of our freedom in an existence where all received values have been overthrown, which is in fact only the awareness that we are free to do anything without limit. Only if we were to confront the moment of truth, to achieve genuine consciousness of the death we carry with us and within us at every moment, would our modern consciousness of our own freedom be tempered by limits. We might say an organic set of values would emerge from the one element of transcendence which will never be taken from us: the moment of our death. Camus deals with the same duality. Totality --the aim of which is a distant ideal, in the service of which "anything goes," where the only value lies in doing whatever serves the ends of that ideal--is juxtaposed with unity. To seek unity is to focus on means, not ends. It is to find solidarity with life that is eternal process, in which there can never be talk of an ideal that will bring history to an end. But this is a solidarity with life, not resignation to it, as those are two very different things. Unity implies limits on the behavior of human beings, not because it is opposed to freedom, but because freedom is a transcendent value here and now, not to be put off to some future millenium. For Camus, this can only be the result of death-awareness, exactly as it is for Bjørneboe. But
the pursuit of totality (which logically, in our age, leads to totalitarianism) is to embrace the freedom that implies "anything goes." It is mankind aware of freedom without awareness of mortality which can only lead one way. Camus criticizes Hegel and the German ideology he propagated for serving as advocates for an aristocracy of success. It is this creation of inverted values, or anti-values against which so much of the History of Bestiality is aimed. Camus turns to the example of the Russian anarchists and Social Revolutionaries who prepared for their own deaths together with those of the targets of their attacks against Absolutism. These were an aristocracy of sacrifice. If there is any hope for this imperfect world of slavery and revolt, action and reaction, endless struggle, it can be glimpsed in tormented but triumphant souls who, while willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, did not want to become new masters in the service of some distant goal—and therefore had no wish to kill or enslave in fact. This was to have been, too, the raw material of Bjørneboe's History of Freedom.

Thus both Bjørneboe and Camus are opposed to old values that served to justify injustice, and which have come to endanger the world in the age after Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Both see an urgent need to find a way to arrive at new values (taking a cue from Nietzsche), and both find a solution in humanity's facing its moment of truth. Human existence needs the transcendent, and we have proven this
as we continue to deny it.

Finally, Camus's essay helps illuminate Bjørneboe's apparent cultural conservatism in his earlier years, and his peculiar devotion to the European cultural heritage during the latter period of his life when he was putting together his merciless arraignment of the legacy of colonialism, of imperialism, of the racist West, of the West of merchants, shopkeepers, the West of mass produced and imported torture and destruction. Kaj Skagen has written of Bjørneboe that he found hope in that aspect of European society that has never become entirely visible: "the world of thought and images, the ideality and insight which strives toward something still unrealized--this European culture also existed." Here is Europe as a possibility. And in The Silence, although Bjørneboe stands with sword raised he cannot in the end let it fall upon Western culture. Camus, perhaps, supplies us with the key to this paradox as well:

To destroy everything is to pledge oneself to building without foundations, and then to holding up the walls with one's hands. He who rejects the entire past, without keeping any part of it which could serve to breathe life into the revolution, condemns himself to finding justification only in the future and, in the meantime, to entrusting the police with the task of justifying the provisional state of affairs. (158)

3.

"If, as an old man, I became too weak to sail out," writes
second mate Jensen, the narrator of *The Sharks* (Haiene, 1973), "if I ever have only the pleasure of my thoughts and my spirit left--then I will buy myself a house and plant a tree and write a book about the history of freedom":

It will not be a learned book, because I am not a learned man. But it will be an honorable book, a true book. In a way I have already begun this "History of Freedom" now, as I attempt to write down what happened to the Neptune and her crew in 1899 and 1900. (96)

If there was ever any doubt of what Jens Bjørneboe was setting out to do when he commenced work on his sea novel--which was to be his last book--these lines should clear any such doubt away. Shortly after the completion of the novel (a best seller in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Germany) he will be able to buy himself a house on the former whaling island of Veierland, where he could begin work on a novel about whaling that was never to get past the earliest stages of research. From *The Sharks* we can get an idea of many things that would have characterized the History of Freedom. Yet the steps in that direction are tentative. One wonders if a working method so thoroughly grounded in making a critique of human existence could have moved into the often facile world of affirmation, advocacy, optimism and the writing of tributes. One primary distinction between this work and the trilogy that precedes it lies in an overriding sense that there is meaning in all that happens to humans and the
human race. The world as seen through the eyes of the narrator, second mate Jensen, is a world of hidden unity, in which the solidarity of life presses forward to its destiny. Only the seeds of this solidarity of all life are to be found in the History of Bestiality. In The Sharks, a dialectical response to the previous works is underway. Bjørneboe is reacting to questions he has spent many years raising.

Even so, the novel is rife with cruelty, inhumanity, acts of oppression and bloody revolt. Both oppressors and oppressed show their gruesome sides in turn. Both oppressor and oppressed get their opportunity to be understood. This is facilitated by the fact that the narrator, second mate Jensen, is among the lower ranks of the ruling group on shipboard, against his own inclinations. Finally, both rulers and ruled show their potential for good when the rigid class barriers—the hierarchical set-up of the sailing vessel—are forced to break down in the face of the threat of collective destruction.

These facets of the story make it clear that the narrative of The Sharks is an allegory, a myth, which is itself filled with allusions to the mythology of the sea going back to the Greeks: but the narrative itself is a myth of our own century. Even the story-telling technique emphasizes this fact. It is a distinctly linear narrative, in contrast to Bjørneboe's three preceding novels.
At the end of 1899 the barque Neptune leaves Manila for Marseilles. As it sets off into the new century it vanishes without a trace, a fact disclosed in the introduction, which is set in 1900 in the offices of the Glasgow shipping firm of Malcolm & Malcolm. The body of the narrative is being written from recollection by second mate Jensen—a Norwegian from Hammerfest, a town at the top of the world. It is impossible to know where or under what conditions he is writing the account, it is simply known that he has survived whatever happened. It is the story of a mutiny. The ship is manned by a crew comprised almost entirely of hardened veterans from the third world, though it flies under the flag of the British Empire. There is something rotten on shipboard, as Jensen quickly senses when he signs on. His suspicions are quickly justified shortly after they part from the shore. The ship's carpenter and another sailor engage in a fight of brutality without bounds. The combatants are depicted larger than life as they stab, beat each other with planks, break each other's bones or crush their opponent's eyes. It is like a battle of giants from Norse or Greek mythology, and so the potential for destruction that resides within human beings is asserted in the early pages of the book. Jensen's job is to tend to the wounded after such happenings. He will be bandaging, daubing and administering morphine increasingly often as the ship sails on. Meanwhile the steward La Fontaine goes mad after the onset of what
appears to be delirium tremens, and he begins to see millions of tiny Chinese everywhere. The first mate, Jeremy Cox, is a fundamentalist Christian whose God dwells as far as possible from mankind. His merciless religion and his prophecies of doom, based on what he perceives as ominous trends in the stockmarket, grow to a frenzy. He refers to the crew of the vessel as "beasts from the abyss." He prophesies, "You shall kill one another and eat each other up like sharks. Blood and murder is your lot. Everything will reveal itself on the final day" (93). In the end he leaps into the shark infested waters surrounding the ship, a misunderstood prophet--whose scorn for human love and bonds leaves him no choice but acquiescence in destruction, including his own. Next, there is the authoritarian cruelty of third mate Dickson, who forces a twelve-year-old child high up into the rigging despite the boy's deathly fear, and when the child is too frightened to come down he refuses permission to the crew to fetch him down. The figure of Dickson poses a question: What brings about his apparent hatred, and this will to abuse his authority? By allowing the mulatto Arrowsmith to take the boy down, Jensen crosses Dickson. For this violation of the principle of authority he earns the contempt of Dickson, until the day Jensen himself is forced to command Dickson with raw authority--which allows Dickson to calm down. He is the classic authoritarian type (or formyndermennesket), who cannot be at ease unless he knows
his place in the hierarchy. This episode itself leads to a bond between Jensen and Pat—the little anemic refugee from London's West End slums whom he has helped to save. As Jensen nurses the boy back to physical health after the trauma, he notices that this offspring of the capital of the world's greatest empire is himself oppressed, deprived of education, values, dignity, a sense of tradition, history or a past. He has less culture or knowledge of life to sustain him than any of the crew from the colonized and undeveloped world. As in Jonas, the sailor who has seen life and wandered the world nurtures the mind of an abandoned child through tales of the sea and of its myths--of Poseidon and of the Flying Dutchman. He does the same for the captain's little daughter Mary, who demands to have every story told over repeatedly, exactly the same way each time.

At first it seems that it is the hierarchy which keeps the ship on course, and that the tactics of divide and rule employed by the captain and his mates--who also have the guns--are the only way to keep the peace. "Today it is quite easy to see that this lack of unity and solidarity--all the passions, all the splits and the power struggles--was the only reason that we astern managed to preserve power and command over the ship as long as we did" (91). This set-up, however, is simultaneously undermining the security of all on board. Arrowsmith has a vendetta against Captain Anderson, and has found a way to unite the
underpaid and underfed crew through their hatred. Anderson is not invested with political power alone, but economic power. He is part owner of the ship he sails, and ships his own cargo, which in this case includes valuable pearls, obtained for nothing from exploited Malaysian pearl divers. In the early chapters he appears not only as an apparently dense, overfed man, astounded at a man like Jensen who does not want a maximum of money and power out of life. He also appears to embody a military-industrial-political complex on the ship. Anderson, with the law and the guns on his side, has had to kill three men during previous mutinies, among them Arrowsmith's brother. As the hatred of the crew gradually coalesces, transforming from racial infighting and mad outbreaks of violence to focus on the ship's rulers and the wealth they guard, the first outbreak of mutiny raises the stakes so that now none can retreat from their positions. Repeated assaults on the captain and mates with their guns, result in terrible casualties for the crew. Between the assaults it falls upon Jensen, relying upon unwritten rules of fair play governing this type of warfare, to change roles and plaster the broken bones and wounds of the rebels in the hold—and to administer the charity of morphine. When the ship encounters a cyclone at sea they are all on board are unprepared to meet it. Easily battered and tossed about in the tempest, it is only at the moment of imminent destruction that the degraded and split crew,
including those in command, find their way to pulling
together to create a life line that will save them all.

The dominating motif is provided by the sharks which
encircle the boat for most of the voyage. Just as the
ship-type known as the "barque" is dissected, its history
and anatomy explored in encyclopedic fashion in the early
chapters--reminiscent of, but falling short of Melville's
technique in *Moby Dick*--an encyclopedic discussion of
sharks is mixed with the bloody imagery of these savage
creatures of mythic proportions. The main point regarding
the sharks here is their cannibalism, for "as soon as the
blood flows from a wounded shark and other sharks get the
scent of it, they are eaten alive by their fellows." Even
so, "the shark had to be included in the creation so that
the world could be brought to completion." The shark has
almost no digestive tract or intestines, and thus food
passes through it almost immediately. It is the living
incarnation of a single passion, for:

from birth until death the shark is driven by one single,
unquenchable desire, of hunger. This infinite hunger sits
in the shark's undeveloped spiral-shaped intestine and
drives it to an uninterrupted hunt--here, in its bowels,
sits the soul of the shark, and the shark's soul is
hunger. The shark is the Ahasverus of the sea; wandering
eternally to satisfy a hunger that can not be satisfied, it
cleaves its way through the endless tropical ocean through
the centuries. (63)

A sea novel, particularly one involving a storm,
quickly invites comparison with works of Joseph Conrad, and
in this case the influence is tacitly acknowledged in the
epigraphs above two chapters. There are certainly many
motifs in Conrad that are common to this novel as well:
the officer signing onto a ship whose crew and fortunes
give off an aura of doom from the outset, as in Conrad's
late novel The Shadow Line; the mortal and savage combat
between men over their share of the wealth, as with the
coolies in Typhoon or the colonialists in Heart of Darkness;
the use of the apocalyptic tropical storm which savages a
crew and a ship to ruins, as in Typhoon; the "stupid"
captain, whose density loosens up in the face of a crisis
of survival, as in the story of Captain MacWhirrr in that
same novel; the idea of the ship's mate who must descend
into the bedlam of humanity mid-ships, to rescue others
from the consequences of their own violence (second mate
Jensen in The Sharks, first mate Jukes in Typhoon); and
there are the smaller touches Bjørneboe and Conrad have in
common, such as the hallucinations produced by D.T.'s (the
engineer who sees a myriad of tiny reptiles in Lord Jim,
and the steward who sees tiny crowds of Chinese on the
Neptune). Of Captain Anderson, by the novel's conclusion
it can be said—as Conrad concludes of Captain MacWhirrr:
"I think he got out of it very well for such a stupid
man." 5

A peculiar trait of sea novels is the virtual absence
of feminine characters, and the rechanneling of female
energies and features to other elements of the narrative.
For Conrad, the feminine can be embodied in the ship itself, as in the case of *The Shadow Line*: "I know that, like some rare woman, she was one of those creatures whose mere existence is enough to awaken an unselfish delight. One feels that it is good to be in a world in which she has her being" (49). For second mate Jensen, the Neptune is in fact Sancta Vénere, a Venus—Venus and Psyche both having been embodiments of the god Neptune in the earliest versions of the Greek pantheon: "I wanted to join myself with her, I wanted to take the wheel and have her in my arms" (23). He later elaborates: "Sancta Vénere was a woman from cold storage to the knob atop her mainmast; a proud, willful, independent and absolutely ungovernable woman, made for that love which requires of her lovers an independence just as great and as sure—a love which can only exist between those endowed with equal rights, between free souls" (47).

Perhaps the most important theme that Bjørneboe and Conrad have in common is the loneliness of responsibility, best expressed in these books as "the loneliness of command." Although Jensen feels nothing but contempt at first for the obese and stolid Anderson, his own countryman, neither does he want the responsibility that falls on his shoulders. He is in fact fleeing responsibility—as he wants to flee his growing bond to little Pat. Command on ship works like a pure equation: responsibility=loneliness. These sentiments in Bjørneboe
parallel those of Conrad's first mate Jukes: "Jukes was uncritically glad to have his Captain at hand. It relieved him as though that man had, by simply coming on deck, taken most of the gale's weight upon his shoulders. Such is the prestige, the privilege and the burden of command" (179).  

In *Typhoon*, Jukes strings up life lines down in the 'tween decks so that the violence-wracked coolies will be able to have a hold during the final spasms of the storm. The life-line motif provides the resolution in *The Sharks* --as well as a counterbalance to the dark motif of sharks/cannibalism that runs through the book. A provocative incident closes Book 1 of the novel: a couple, a nameless man and woman without papers, are fished dead out of the water by the Neptune's crew. They had been floating far apart in the high waves linked together by a length of rope. Whatever their catastrophe had been, this "must have been perhaps the very last thing they did, to tie the rope fast to both life belts. That way they went together and didn't lose one another" (109). As the ravaged, demasted Neptune whirls like a cork in the storm waters at the end, Arrowsmith, the mutiny leader, puts up a life line across the ship to make it possible to work together against final destruction. And it is Captain Anderson, a man who has dedicated his life to profit and power above his fellow men ("Here on board it is I who am the British government" [143]), who himself wades through the jags and vortices of the surf at a coral reef to tie up
a life line. It is Anderson, who, with the help of Arrowsmith and Jensen, carries the broken and battered inhabitants of the vessel, one by one, bound to his back, to the hazardous shores, as the Neptune prepares to turn on its side.

On the island they will all become equals. Their arms are reduced to two pistols, but by taking turns with weapons and sharing the watch, they need not fear the unfriendly natives on the island. In this way, they await the day of their rescue. Once again, the allegory stands forth starkly. Bjørneboe would be one of the last to depict "cannibals" in a primitive country threatening "civilized" people. The idea is that the cannibalistic in the world—as exemplified by the sharks, and the human beings they had been aboard the Neptune—can be kept at bay by a new ordering of things. The final image is that of second mate Jensen holding the hand of his ward Pat, looking into a new century (211-14).

At the center of the novel is a chapter called simply "History" ("Historien"). At the same time as it is a key to the ideas which are threaded through the narrative, it is also an entirely non-narrative, experiential, speculative piece of discourse, which seems almost to have been inserted to break the continuity of the action. Jensen (Jens Bjørneboe's own literary progeny, as his name implies) now speaks alone, deprived of the action of his story, and his words for all intents and purposes could be
those of the external author, and not just the internal narrator. It is here he imagines writing a History of Freedom. The world is described as matter and ideas, all permeated by spirit. As a child, he "never felt the spirits, I saw them, because everything that lives is of spirit" (96). Denying that this experience of the world is a result of feelings, dream or ecstasy, he claims it is simply an incredible "awakeness" that brings on this experience. This is no longer the universe resembling insanely mechanical clockworks which hovers over the History of Bestiality. The chaotic world of the God Neptune, who makes the waters boil and lives in the blood of human beings, is itself subsumed into a greater order of which it is only a part. "For me, the planets, the earth and the stars are held in their place in the cosmos by an enormous spiritual force that gathers, creates and maintains":

I see this all-permeating, all-maintaining force in everything around me with my eyes, the flying fish, the seagulls, every leaf of a tree, the ebb and flow of the tides, in the moon's complicated route as it embraces the waters and sucks them toward it--and that which I see is of spirit because it itself is the force of life--it is life's spirits. It is life's spirits, life itself by which I am surrounded and surround.

There is a meaning that permeates a human life, and that may be called fate. Likewise, then, there is a meaning permeating humanity's life, and that is called history:
History, the history of the world, has its meaning, its goal, and humanity will reach this goal, only with that frightening, that terrible addition that the way to this goal of History will be infinitely much longer, and much much bloodier than we dare to think.... The goal is that humanity in brotherhood shall share this planet amongst itself--share the world's wealth between us in justice and freedom.

This--to share the world amongst us in peace and with justice--that is mankind's meeting with itself.

But the path there is also a path of freedom, in choice, to choose something means to relinquish something else, choice means loneliness--and freedom also means the freedom to do evil. Humanity's liberation must be humanity's own work. The way to the goal--to inhabit the planet in brotherhood and with justice--we must walk ourselves; the gods can not walk it for us, for then it would not be a path of freedom. And the path will go along abysses and into the depths, through deserts and over battle fields, through ruins and prison camps, with millions in flight and in hunger and homeless, the path will lead to Evil's delusions, and to delusions' evilness--and this path will lead us to the meeting with ourselves.

This is History, it is the path of freedom--and we walk this path in freedom whether we want freedom or not. The way will be full of false guides, false leaders of humanity--of seducers and false prophets, and we have the freedom to choose the evil liberators, to acclaim them and to follow them, as they have the freedom to mislead us.

But this dark, bloody path of freedom, it is the way to humanity's meeting with itself. (99-100)

Conrad had suggested that the capacity for "deliberate belief" was the vindicating element through the debacle of all humankind's strivings. This, he suggested, is the only thing to replace the modern hypocrisy of "principles." Camus has described two types of nihilism that appear in our times. One is the nihilism of resignation, and the other the nihilism of an all-or-nothing "totality": complete affirmation of our existence as it is, or complete negation. Both lead to the most barbarous destruction. The capacity for deliberate
belief might allow human beings to steer between the two extremes of nihilism. Though Bjørneboe speaks of the goal of history, it is the manner in which human beings choose to use their freedom on the way to that goal which is of utmost importance. The end does not justify the means: the means justify the end. Otherwise we end up like Conrad's Kurtz. When Kurtz first writes his report for the "International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs," he is brimming with idealism for the total re-making of the peoples who inhabit the colonies: "By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded." The scrawled conclusion written years later at the bottom of the report reads, "Exterminate all the brutes!" (Heart 86-87). This was Conrad's genius. Looking back over colonialism he was able to look forward towards totalitarian thinking in the century that followed. The gift of prophecy often begins with looking back. The Bjørneboe chapter outlined above, supposedly written in the last century by narrator Jensen, derives prophetic power by a similar method. The urge toward Totality, an all-or-nothing proposition which leads only to an ideology of conquest which is governed by no values other than those that achieve the desired end, Camus opposed with the struggle toward Unity. Bjørneboe here, uniting his political thought with a pantheistic metaphysics, and accepting struggle in the context of the solidarity of all life, allows himself a certain, qualified
reconciliation with the world: at least for the time being.

4.
The work on The Sharks had made heavy claims on Bjørneboe's emotional resources and even his physical state. Having passed through several sequences of depression, alcohol overconsumption, nervous breakdown, and then each time facing the terror of sitting down to write anew, the completion of the book left him a sense of self-confidence in reviewing his literary output, and the certainty that a major transition was underway. "I was completely clear," he writes in his unpublished autobiography, "that I had made a book that had come to stay, that it would not be gone after the Christmas sale. I was on the way toward the History of Freedom, the Mystery of the Good--but only on the way" (MHH 38). The image of the lobster that leaves its shell in order to grow, which he has employed several times before, is applied again. He writes in the autobiography that he had entered a new phase. His life in the community where his family lived in Billingstad is experienced as encagement: "I had the impression of being slowly suffocated, and I knew that I had to get away--away from Billingstad and the City of Python. It is in no way the fault of my surroundings.... It was myself. I was being suffocated by my own shell, which was no longer the
right size" (51).

The island of Veierland is cut off from the mainland and the road to Oslo by a channel that is crossed by an infrequent ferry. It was until recent times inhabited almost exclusively by a community of Norwegian whalers and their families. The house that is now known as "Bjørneboe House" stands on a mild slope looking down at the tiny pier about a quarter mile away—the house painted yellow, and with the simple yet delicate carpentry around the eaves typical in Scandinavia during the last century. Though Bjørneboe is received immediately after his arrival with suspicion by some of the local populace, those who have the opportunity to meet their garrulous neighbor find him engaging. Over time a small community forms at the house—an ever changing community of artists, aspiring writers, young runaways, occasional spongers, and the occasional guest who is on the wrong side of the law. This small, fluctuating, mostly male group of residents is described by Bjørneboe in terms endowing it with qualities of a kind of transitory paradise. The terms he uses are reminiscent of those used to describe the temporary island utopia at the end of The Sharks. A letter accepting the offer of an interview for television with Norwegian Broadcasting's Haagen Ringness (9 Jan. 1976) provides a typical example. Describing his household, he mentions a boy of 17, "on the run from his mother," a man named Truls, 25, "on the run from his lady lovers," but as for himself,
he has his daughters out as often as possible, because "the little ones relish the peace and quiet here; they really love the island." In the letter he emphasizes that they are cut off from telephone and television—and if a new world war were to break out, "the rumor would eventually reach Veierland":

In reality I live in a paradisaical sanatorium with air, wind, salt water and genuine, fatty cow's milk. Once in a while a homeless soul settles in with us for some days, but folks who come unannounced just to talk about themselves or to bother others are tossed out, including in the physical sense.

Homosexual relationships are now a fully accepted part of his life, and this constitutes one of the overriding concerns of the autobiography on which he was working. In it he sets out three types of suppression of homosexual inclinations in men who are dominated by them: 1) a radical repression, which expresses itself in utter contempt for homosexuals; 2) the subtler repression of closet homosexuals who will not even confess to their physicians or psychiatrist; and 3) that of practicing homosexuals who still cannot accept themselves at the deepest level (63). Bjørneboe assesses Ernest Hemingway and Jack London to be members of the first group, basing his diagnosis on their indisputably thorough observations of males and unconvincing depictions of women—a tendency which he says comes clearest in Hemingway's Islands in the Stream. He connects the totally repressed homosexuality of the above
figures with the fact of their "going under ... in alcoholism and suicide." Additionally, memories of his father "the consul" and "ship-owner" surface again in the autobiography. He recalls a dialogue with his father—who had joined the throngs in London supporting Oscar Wilde during his trial—a dialogue which he says freed him from a great deal of inner strife later in life. The thirteen-year-old asks why Oscar Wilde had to go to jail. His father answers: "Well—yes, his grammar was a bit off; he was putting things in the masculine which one usually puts in the feminine." On reflection, Bjørneboe adds that those words saved him many anxieties as he grew older "because I already knew that I myself wasn't so precise with my 'grammar'—not me either" (66). As he grew older he found that it is not only Wilde who was on his "side," but "Rimbaud, Verlaine also were on my side, later André Gide and many, many others." Yet for most of his life Bjørneboe also relished his image as the family man. Photos displaying a playful "pappa" with wife and children and possibly cats, in the den or living room or in the yard, are not at all hard to come by. But this was not, obviously, posing. As is the case with his introversion and extroversion, with his metaphysics and politics, Bjørneboe is not one thing or the other nor is he in between. More often than not he willfully embodies two extremes.

During the years at Veierland, Bjørneboe makes
occasional treks into the City of Python, where he quickly becomes engaged with people of the streets, ex-prisoners, disaffected young people, while in his spare time he begins writing pieces for Kriminal Journal—a low-brow crime periodical whose very low reputation he, for a time, appears to relish (Wandrup 247). As time goes on he begins to mention in his correspondence that he has now achieved his place in European letters. He commences to sum up his career to that point, and the conclusion is that there is an international scope to his achievement. Now he will begin the second phase of his career. He plans a sequence of thirty books to be written in the next twenty-five years in the second wave of his oeuvre. His claim to international standing, however, is somewhat contradicted by his very marginal success in being published in English. Clearly he must have felt this lack. As early as 1971 he wrote to Carl Weber—the director, at one time from the Berliner Ensemble, who had directed The Bird Lovers—that he would have to turn away from epic-style theater, because it was too complex and too costly to get produced, even with the most positive reviews (24 Feb. 1971). He adds, "It is indeed a perverse situation in which writers from small language areas find themselves: for us it is not the original edition which is important, but rather the translation!—Something which is only found in Norwegian is not really published." According to Fredrik Wandrup he compensated after The Sharks with self-assured statements
of fact: "From a literary point of view it's going, as I said, very well for me, and I'm regarded now internationally among those in the field as one of the greatest writers currently living. That is pleasant" (244). In the letter to Haagen Ringness in January 1976 he reports great breakthroughs in France and the United States—the two countries precisely where he would see virtually no breakthrough. "After enormous delays," he writes, "Moment of Freedom has come out in the USA in New York, and gotten an almost completely panegyric reception." This account by Bjørneboe himself is in fact accurate. Wherever the book was reviewed, which was most often not in the literary publications that counted, reviews had been thoroughly positive. Norton, the publisher, inexplicably stopped promotions of the book shortly after its release, and no second edition was ever printed.10

On the 27th of December, 1975, a long poem appears on the pages of Oslo's major daily paper, Dagbladet, under the title "Farewell Brother Alcohol" ("Farvel bror alcohol"). It is Jens Bjørneboe proclaiming publicly, in elegiac form, his definitive rupture with his oldest friend:

The many years
I still have left on earth
shall be lived to the fullest,
alone and in clarity
without your fraternity
without your good and warm
hand in mine.
Every word must be weighed
on finer scales.
Every thought be set glowing
on the anvil.
Every feeling in the acid
so it can be seen
whether the metal
is pure and genuine enough.
The time has come for
the divorce.
I've long known it would come,
only not when
(SD 188)

Accompanying the public proclamation of this break with his past is an urge to begin summing up his oeuvre and career up to that point—an urge which becomes increasingly apparent in late 1975 and early 1976. In 1976 he begins work on his autobiography With Horns and Tail (Med Horn og Hale) with the words "My first suicide took place when I was thirteen years old...." A nationally broadcast interview with Norwegian Broadcasting's Haagen Ringness was filmed early in 1976, and is remarkably organized so that over the course of the two-part interview Bjørneboe's career is traced through his major achievements—work by work—in chronological order. The interview comes very close to being an author's defense of his own work—and therefore, his life—before the nation.11 Asked about the accuracy of some of the charges he has publicly leveled against various institutions, authorities and individuals over the years, he responds, "I have never, good lord, I have never been convicted for a single injury after all that I have written--I have never written anything that has been incorrect, in the main, in serious things no one has
ever gotten me for imprecision" (Ringness 20). He condemns justice and police systems not only in Norway, but in Europe east and west, in the Soviet Union and the United States. He is asked if he believes the things he has written can have helped in such matters. There is a pause, followed by an unequivocal—"No."

Ringness further suggests to Bjørneboe in the interview that his renunciation of alcohol is not as definitive as his nationally published poem suggested. Bjørneboe responds that such an idea is the result of not reading closely: "It says that you are still my friend, but at a distance." He emphasizes that alcohol has always helped him through the many dark hours of winter in the north, but that he is awaiting the spring. ("Hell and damnation ... I think it's been dark enough months now" [26].) During this time his letters increasingly evoke idylls of island life, and the coming of spring. In a letter to Ringness after the interview (30 March 1976), he begins with a note of unexplained urgency, wondering why the broadcast had not been scheduled for the end of March as promised. He suggests that he is not a "beloved pop star" at the network: "Have you encountered unpleasantness from all of that ungifted office-mob in management--or is the broadcast on ice until further notice? Who knows, I have not been so terribly prim and proper in my utterances concerning directors in NRK." He adds abruptly, "--For me, it would serve a certain purpose if it were broadcast
before Easter" (emphasis added). In the postscript he
further adds, "I'm a bit tired out. Soon it will be
spring; the boat on the water, riding trips, physical
labor, fishing, hunting." An envelope containing a
nonsense rhyme to his daughter Suzanne is covered with a
sketch of spring foliage, birds and fish on a coastline,
and above it stands the word "Våren!": Spring! Spring, in
Bjørneboe's repertoire of imagery, is not a simple
affirmation of life, but bears with it its ancient and
mythic meaning. It is the time when both the pariah and
the man of spirit--together, for they are intimately
linked--may be sacrificed. The words of his early poem
evoke this:

It was a spring. And the branch I chose
was heavy with the smells of flowers that snowed.
So we were both fruit--on each our tree.

The poem ends with the idea that the event must happen by
the Sabbath, before Pesach: "The others fled, just we two
remained" (SD 17).

Bjørneboe was in fact very often alone at the house on
Veierland, for the "community" of artists, renegades and
lovers was a transient one. He looked forward to visits
from his three young daughters, who each had a bedroom set
aside with their names painted on the doors. For the most
part, they and their mother went on living their lives in
the community and environment that he felt forced to leave,
due to the overwhelming sense that he had been suffocating in his own "shell." He possessed at the house on Veierland a double-barreled shot-gun, and collecting all varieties of knives was becoming an obsession (Wandrup 252). A sculptor arrived at Veierland and began work on a statue of the author, which would years later greet guests arriving at Oslo's Klub 7—and he left the first clay model on the premises. It was the author's responsibility to keep his own likeness watered and damp. That Bjørneboe would appreciate this irony is clear. Had he not depicted his Semmelweis—the man who could not get his message out—hanging his clothes on his own monument, and embracing it?--A statue that was to represent the myth Semmelweis would become long after he was gone? Meanwhile he owed taxes on the house that he was unable to pay. His generosity to his many guests and friends staying with him at Veierland has brought about a great outward flow of funds, and the threat of losing the house becomes quite real. He writes appeals for advances to various publishers and theaters without result. Even an appeal to the king, a highly unusual step for Bjørneboe, is respectfully dismissed by a functionary at the palace, who suggests somewhat absurdly that it be sent on to the Royal Department for the Church and Education. The contrast between the successful crossroads he had reached as a writer, and the reality that this recognition brought with it not even minimal financial security, is glaring. He
wanders to the homes of neighbors, or down the dirt road to
the island's only general store to procure a bottle of beer—he might sit by the shed beside the store, near the island's only telephone, for hours without moving. When he is asked by the couple who own the store what he is doing sitting there, motionless, the answer is, "I'm writing."13

With his autobiography in progress, and a grant awarded from Japan to finance his trip to observe whaling first hand, even though he had returned to the companionship of "Bror Alkohol," the writing process, clearly, had not come to a standstill. The writer was not empty—as has sometimes been conjectured. Nor was he gravely, physically ill. Towards the end of April 1976 he reluctantly accedes to the urging of jazz composer Ole Paus to sojourn in the City of Python to record his poetry for Paus's musical settings. There he makes rounds of pubs and restaurants where his customary listeners might be found. Symptoms of illness are appearing at this point, but they are those which result directly from an immense consumption of alcohol. Soon abandoned in agitated state by the hangers-on in the artistic and literary scene, he chooses to spend his time talking with young anarchists, to whom he is fond of quoting from the Haymarket martyrs and Emma Goldman. According to Wandrup, in a few days' time he is being avoided, is becoming isolated. During the first of May when various marches and functions are taking place throughout the town, he is spotted sitting alone in a cafe
by some young actors who had come in from a march for a drink. They offer him a place to stay for the night, and with coaxing he accepts. He is unable to take food that night. The next morning he is gone.\(^\text{14}\) He returns to Veierland, and after a day or two makes constant trips down to the general store to try to telephone his family—but cannot get through to them. On a Thursday night he awakens the couple at the store, knocking and yelling their names—"I've got to talk."\(^\text{15}\) On Saturday his wrist is bandaged by a neighbor—apparently the author Karin Bang—perhaps his closest friend on the island. It was Sunday May 10th that a letter dated 9 May 1979, on Bjørneboe's stationery, was found by an arrival at the house, asking that he not be frightened by what he "will find" inside. "Life takes its course," it says, "and there comes a time when it ends. For me, the time came yesterday and tonight.

"What can one say: Good luck on your journey?"

One more thing: see to it that the usual newspaper lie about "he was found dead at his desk" is denied. The fact of the matter is I have taken my life out of loneliness—of a loneliness that in the long run is greater than a man can bear. A new "Pat" I won't be looking for, and wouldn't find him in any case.

5.

Whatever crossroads Bjørneboe may have reached in his personal life that led to his final solitude, it is
inseparable from the mission that had led him past the point of simply raising objections, voicing a protest, making a critique, posing contradictions. He had long since reached the stage of contradicting the most fundamental values inherited from Western society and history. He had arrived at the stage of establishing some kind of new basis for new values. This, of course, parallels and echoes both the mission and the end of Nietzsche--whose syphilis perhaps all too simplistically has been blamed for his madness, though Bjørneboe himself conjectured that Nietzsche's syphilis better positioned him to attack his transvaluation of values: outside of society. The Sharks was to have begun the Mystery of Good ("det godes mysterium"). Camus says that where there is no element of transcendence in our view of the world, there can be no values other than the value of success--and it might be said that Bjørneboe was returning to a preoccupation with the idea of the transcendent which at one time he had found in Anthroposophy. He writes in the autobiography that the first months of work on The Sharks was a remarkable time, there was "an intense feeling that everything, both man and nature, were penetrated, radiated through with spirit." He sensed a meaning behind everything that existed. "The world was of spirit, and planets and suns and grass and clouds, everything was--like human beings--sustained and maintained by an enormous, gathering spiritual power, a power which filled the whole
cosmos with meaning" (41). He comes to understand the meaning of the words "Not a sparrow falls to the field if it is not the will of God." The words are no excuse for slackness in our solidarity with our fellows, and our willingness to share the burdens of others. The point is to turn sympathy into action. "Words too, are actions, and one of the main points for a person who writes in our day is to get words to mean something again."\(^1\) Words, then, are not to be seen relativistically as meaningless, signifying vessels, which can mean anything according to context and who is uttering them. Nor should they automatically be charged with meaning handed down to us in fossilized form. If words are empty, they lack responsibility. To responsibly charge words with meaning--instead of submerging them in the relativism that becomes Dada and literary nihilism, which assume that literary discourse must always mean something entirely different depending upon whom the reader is--this is a lonely task. It is not unlike Conrad's "loneliness of Command", and the "loneliness of responsibility" we find in *The Sharks*.

What is to be made of all these increasing contradictions, and these tightening tensions in the work, and in the life, of an author to the point where he must be expelled from life itself? Why does a writer cloister himself off with his artistic creation in order to find a higher meaning, and descend to the lower depths of humanity at the same time? How can an artist aspire to a crystal
clear vision of the forces in motion in everything living, and drown the vision in physical intoxication? And why so much yearning for the renewal of life in the spring, and then to use it to terminate one's own life? With a writer whose fiction and biography are so inextricably intertwined—whose individual fate he consciously interwove with human history as the keeper of the protocols—it would be too easy to dismiss the idea that perhaps he had scripted the course his life would take quite early on. In that early poem "Ischariot," the man of spirit and the pariah are joined by death, and by destiny, in the spring: "The others fled--just we two remained."

6.

After Bjørneboe's death the myths began to fly. Like August Strindberg, Bjørneboe was a writer who could be claimed by many parties, sometimes opposing ones. Was he a mystic or a social critic? A philosopher or activist? Sage or rebel? Yogi or commissar? At his Anthroposophic funeral his poetry was read by his wife Tone and poet André Bjerke. During the ceremony a group of anarchists appeared walking up the aisle, and draped the coffin with the red and black flag. This, if nothing else, demonstrates the way opposite assessments of his work have existed side by side. On the 12th of March, 1977, a performance of Bjørneboe pieces at the National Theater titled "I Take the
Liberty" (from the phrase he often employed "Jeg tar meg den frihet") was interrupted by some members of the audience. They were given the floor, and addressed the public on the manner in which art, after the artists are safely dead, belongs to the speculators. "The work to create a myth out of Jens Bjørneboe is on. He will be placed on a cultural landscape and made into a national sacred treasure that won't represent any danger for the guardian-types ("formyndermennesket") that he would be were he alive." Their press release adds: "If you're wondering who we are that are saying this, then we are a group of anarchists.

"If you wonder what anarchism is, then read Jens Bjørneboe." 18

This is virtually the prologue to Semmelweis, except for the fact that this time it is real, and instead of interrupting an operetta, it is interrupting Bjørneboe's own work. Meanwhile, Kaj Skagen concludes in his book on Bjørneboe: "The writing over Jens Bjørneboe's life and death is written on all our bedroom walls and our streets: 'Metaphysics or suicide!'" He adds, though, that this slogan, borrowed from Hans Jaeger, does not mean that those seeking a spiritual path must physically take their own lives—but that neglect of this side of existence is also neglect of the meaning of human life and history, which in time can only lead to "the individual's self-deserved spiritual death, and society's descent into chaos" (Skagen
Bjørneboe himself never tried to deny either aspect of his work—though he was increasingly in quest of the reason, the necessity, for this split into two "selves."

It is perhaps best to present the dilemma in his own words, from his unfinished autobiography:

But what has become now of that little boy who should have died of his bilateral lung inflammation already when he was eighteen months old? I mean, if he had been a proper child. What has become of that little son of a consul and ship-owner he was some years later, with bad milk teeth and long black curls.... It is he I am on the trail of. And the fifteen-year-old who got a body full of tubercles, so that he didn't have to go to school a whole year and read only books instead? He who got a revolver shot through the leg when he was thirteen.... "Entelechie" is what Goethe calls the immortal in human beings—that which can not die. Where in me is that little consul's son? Him, from the overclass of a small town, with whom I want to speak. There are a whole lot of things I would ask him about, and he could, perhaps, have had a lot to teach me. I could have come to know how his depressions were, and about why the split went straight through us both, straight through the entire mind, from tip to toe--the split which is on one side an extreme introversion, and on the other side a just as extreme extroversion, when it comes to the capacity for social indignation.... (29)

Jens Bjørneboe was one of that breed of writers who script their lives in a way that creates material for their art, so in the end, their own life, as raw material, comes in second to the writing. In this he joins Strindberg, and he joins many of the Romantics. It is this working method which differentiates him from one of his greatest artistic mentors: Brecht. To make his life into material he had to absorb all of Western culture, in order to better assault it--through himself. Poet, painter, song-writer, novelist,
essayist, playwright—though he burned his own life for the fuel of his art, he did not deny life. He developed many artistic tools for his search through the devastation of history, but never developed weapons, other than the pen, the penchant for polemic, a sense of the absurd, and a deep, ringing laughter. He was unarmed to the last: the creature on the sea floor who wills himself to leave the shell, but in this case the goal was not to grow a new shield--it was all for the sake of the growth itself. The task of compassion is to leave later generations armed, but with something other than armor.

There are things bigger than man that begin within him.
ABBREVIATIONS FOR TITLES OF WORKS BY BJØRNEBOE
USED IN THE TEXT

SD    Samlede dikt (Collected Poems)
FHG   Før hanen galer (Before the Cock Crows)
UHH   Under en hårdere himmel (Under a Harder Heaven)
OH    Den onde hyrde (The Evil Shepherd)
DOH   Drømmen og hjulet (The Dream and the Wheel)
UT    Uten en tråd (Without a Stitch)
FO    Frihetens øyeblikk (Moment of Freedom)
KT    Kruttårnet: La poudrière (The Powder House)
SH    Stillheten (The Silence)
HH    Hertug Hans (Duke Hans)
SS    Samlede Skuespill (Collected Plays)
MHH   Med horn og hale (With Horns and Tail)

ESSAY COLLECTIONS

NMN   Norge mitt Norge (Norway my Norway)
VEA   Vi som elsket Amerika (We Who Loved America)
POA   Politi og Anarki (Police and Anarchy)
UMH   Under en mykere himmel (Under a Milder Heaven)
OB    Om Brecht (On Brecht)
OT    Om Teater (On Theater)
BOM   Bøker og mennesker (Books and People)
NOTES

ONE / INTRODUCTION TO BJØRNEBOE

1 Die Moorsoldaten was first published in Zürich, 1935, with the subtitle: "13 Monate: Konzentrationslager." It came out almost immediately in a small edition in English that same year with an introduction by Brecht collaborator Lion Feuchtwanger under the title Rubber Truncheon (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1935).

2 The experience is described several places in Bjørneboe's work, most notably in the novel The Silence (163). His biographer, Fredrik Wandrup, has drawn attention to the anecdote as well (24).

3 Haagen Ringness summed up Bjørneboe's role using this term when conducting what was to be the final interview with him in 1976. The interview is published in Arken as "A Last Conversation with Jens Bjørneboe."

4 Frihetens øyeblikk was published as Moment of Freedom by Norton in 1975.

5 There are two official languages in Norway: nynorsk and bokmål. Bokmål, though more widely used, uses an orthography that is closer to Danish. Bokmål is a modified form of the riksmål which was used during hundreds of years of Danish rule, and which is almost identical to Danish. Bjørneboe never warmed to the Norwegian language reform, preferring the traditional literary language in which Holberg, Bjørnson Ibsen and Hamsun, among others, had written, and was a member for some years of the Norwegian Bokmålforeningen, an author's association.

6 Though one of the sources for this vignette is a work of fiction, it was recounted to Ringness (15), and is verified by Wandrup (see note 2 above).

TWO / THE EARLY WORKS

1 This is Bjørneboe's own assessment, from the introduction to Hertug Hans (6-7).

2 This quote and the entire passage in which it is included are to be found in Karl Madsen's book: En Litteraer Proces (32). The volume is an account of the legal action and proceedings, by Bjørneboe's Danish
attorney. Bjørneboe took critic Storm to court for libel and won, though the decision was to be overturned by one vote in the appellate court.

Rilke's Neue Gedichte and Das Buch der Bilder can be marked off from his later poetry by the way in which they dwell on the concrete, rather than the metaphysical—as much of Rilke's later poetry does. But this concreteness is at one remove from "reality": more often than not the poems reflect on works of art, or Greek and Christian mythology. See C. F. MacIntyre's introduction to Rilke: Fifty Selected Poems.

The first six lines of "Der Einsame" in the original German read:

Wie einer, der auf fremden Meeren fuhr,
so bin ich bei den ewig Einheimischen;
die vollen Tage stehn auf ihren Tischen,
mir aber ist die Ferne voll Figur.

In mein Gesicht reicht eine Welt herein,
die vielleicht unbewohnt ist wie ein Mond...
(Werke 1: 324)

The Norwegian text of "Emigranten" is quoted below in full for purposes of comparison. Norwegian, due to the abundance of material, will not be quoted in the original in the notes, but for a few exceptional cases.

I alle rum med mørknede tapeter,
ved alle senger jeg har sovet i,
in byer hvor jeg ikke kunne bli,
vet ingen bofast enn\nu hva jeg heter.

I bjerget går en buskap med sin gjeter,
langs mennesker og haver går en sti.
En større hjemløs førte meg forbi;
jeg er et barn av fremmede planeter.

En større nåvnløs tok meg mektig med,
fra ansikter og land og byer om meg.
Langs gater gikk jeg, langs alle\ner kom jeg,
langs hus og traer i blå århundrers fred.
Jeg bor i horisonters silhuetter,
i dager, skumringer, i vind og netter.
(SD 23-24)

Lines 7-11 of Romische Sarkophaje read:

in langsam sich verzejrenden Gewändern
ein langsam Aufgelösten lag--
bis es die unbekannten Munde schluckten, 
die niemals reden. (Wo besteht und denkt 
ein Hirn, um ihrer einst sich zu bedienen?)
(1: 424)

7. "Lazarus" bears the subtitle: "Fra en tidlig Kristen 
Sarkofag" ("From an Early Christian Sarcophagus"), 
something which might strengthen the case for the influence 
of Rilke in these early poems.

8. "Und dann und wann ein weisser Elefant" (1: 442-43).

9. "In solchen Nächten wächst mein Schwesterlein, / das 
vor mir war und vor mir starb, ganz klein. / Viel solche 
Nächte waren schon seither: / Sie muss schon schön sein. 
Bald wird irgendetwie sie frein" (1: 380-84).

10. The refrain from "Von der Kindestsmörderin Marie 
Farrar" reads: "Doch ihr, Ich bitte euch, willt nicht in 
Zorn verfallen / Denn alle Kreatur braucht Hilf von allen" 
(Hauspostille 8-12).

11. Ortega y Gasset writes in La Deshumanización del 
Arte:

Pero es que, entonces, bajo la máscara de amor al arte puro 
se esconde hartazgo del arte, odio al arte? Como sería 
posible? Odio del arte no puede surgir sino donde germina 
también odio a la ciencia, odio al Estado, odio, en suma, a 
la cultura toda. Es que fermenta en los pechos europeos un 
inconceivable rencor contra su propia esencia histórica, 
algo así como el odium professionis que acomete al monje, 
tras largos años de claustro, aversión a su disciplina a la 
regla misma que ha informado su vida? (210)

12. Although the English translation, The Least of 
These, had a fair distribution in the late 1950s (It was 
one a Book of the Month Club selection in the US), for the 
purposes of discussing the book in light of the so-called 
"Jonas debate" in Norway, we will retain the Norwegian 
title Jonas, which in English would be "Jonah"--a title 
which stresses the Judeo-Christian mythology that lies 
behind the more apparent social criticism.

13. Norwegian prison terms for driving while 
intoxicated for first offenses are more than one month in 
duration.

14. The articles, published primarily in Dagbladet, are 
assembled in the essay collection, Vi som elsket Amerika 
(We Who Loved Amerika).

15. The translations here are those of Alan Sheridan in 
the Penguin edition, Discipline and Punish.
I have not attempted here to trace any direct influence from Bjørneboe in Foucault's work. But the prison debate he opened up in Norway is evidently one of the earliest of the general prison reform debates which spread through almost all Western countries in the sixties. Foucault's *Surveiller et punir* is an attempt to place this new concern in a philosophical framework—and comes a decade and a half after Bjørneboe's first prison pieces. The fact that Foucault made his stay in Scandinavia years prior to writing *Surveiller et punir* might not be without interest, however.

Bjørneboe writes in "Litteratur og virkeligheten":

Shall literature be duty-bound to concern itself only with the "inner," with "subjective" reality? Shall literature be duty-bound to keep its hands clean, not to dirty them with the "external," the "objective" brutal and terrible reality which surrounds us? Shall the writers of belles lettres, the poets, be too fine to depict reality in all its baseness, dirtiness and meanness?

We are here faced with the literary problem of classical naturalism: to speak true, to write without lying.

Of course literature has a double task: namely, to portray both the "internal" and "external" realities. It is this which makes belles lettres a unique genre. For myself, a book's truth-gestalt is becoming more and more the decisive thing.... If literature brings solutions, if it brings answers, then it is lying. (POA 271)

He adds further on:

For myself, I would put it thus: Literature's area is neither the external nor the internal: its task is to convey the encounter between the two.

The poetic project lies in portraying the meeting between external reality and the human mind.

The world about us reflected in a human mind. (276)

The founder and patriarch of Márquez's Macondo, José Arcadio Buendía, is visionary to the point of madness. His is a vision which will decide the political and economic fate of the little society he and his family have fostered for one hundred years. Like Bjørneboe's Jølsen, he dominates the life of his town at the beginning, and then moves from the foreground to the background of the narrative--José Arcadio dies but his "spirit" never leaves--remaining always a strong presence. Both characters are obsessed with bringing the miracles of science to their virgin territory. José Arcadio Buendía tells his wife Úrsula, "En el mundo están ocurriendo cosas increíbles.... Ahí mismo, al otro lado del río, hay toda
clase de aparatos mágicos, mientras nosotros seguimos viviendo como los burros (García Márquez, Catedra, 79).

19 Bjørneboe's American translator Esther Mürer reports that he told her that it did not matter that one contradicts himself in what he writes, so long as each time he writes what he has to say in words "as hard as cannon balls." (Esther Mürer, letter to the author, 10 May 1981).

20 As of this writing, a literary researcher who wants to obtain Uten en tråd may very likely have to go through the following steps: He will first request the book at the main University Library in downtown Oslo. He may then be referred to the local police station to get a signature on the request written by the librarian. This will produce yet another referral to the Police Central at Grønlandsleiret. There he might meet with the department's Prosecution Adjutant Solberg, who himself does not like the policy of prohibiting books, and will offer ample evidence that it almost never happens in Norway. He will not, however, be empowered to help. He will refer the researcher to the Oslo Municipal Court, where permission to read the book must be sought from a judge. The judge, it turns out, is the same one who ruled on Uten en tråd originally, and does not feel empowered to overturn his own ruling by granting permission for the researcher to read the book in the original language. Finally, if he is able to demonstrate proof of having visited all of the above--the State Prosecutor's office will put him in touch with the State Prosecutor himself, who, after appropriate inspection of identification, will take five copies of the researcher's signature and address, and put a stamp on the request, with his signature. This can be taken back to the main library, where the researcher will be able to have the book removed from the safe for use in the main reading room during library hours.

21 Adjutant Solberg at the Prosecution Office in the Central Police Station in Oslo suggests that the Bjørneboe in Uten en tråd "didn't use any really vulgar language. It was, you might say, almost academic language" (J. Solberg, personal interview, 8 Nov. 1985).

22 Dorenfeldt was by implication one of the officials accused in the series of prison articles. He will later be the one of the objects of Bjørneboe's investigation--in the form of articles and a docu-drama--of the trial in which social misfit Fredrik Torgersen was put away for a rape and murder during an atmosphere of public hysteria, when the evidence against him was fairly slim. Dorenfeldt prosecuted that case as well. It is his peculiar fate that many will always remember him as the enemy of Bjørneboe. By virtue of his own modus operandi, he solved Bjørneboe's dilemma of putting a face and a name on the forces he was
opposed to.

23 He also somewhat incongruously points out in the article "Om norsk rettsikkerhet" ("On Norwegian Law and Order") that the works of a leading author were being prosecuted (i.e., Mykle's) by the same men who refused to prosecute a gang of men who publicly cut off the hair of a young prostitute accused of having serviced Germans--after the war in the center of Oslo (NMN 65-66).

THREE / THE HISTORY OF BESTIALITY

1 For our purposes, the "History of Bestiality" will refer to this trilogy--though Bjørneboe has at times applied the term to all his novels from Før hanen galler through the last novel of the trilogy, i.e., fourteen novels. At times he even seems to include virtually all his written works up to that point.

2 Inge Kristiansen, in his dissertation Jens Bjørneboe og Antroposofien, takes the position that the trilogy cannot be properly understood without reference to Anthroposophy and the metaphysical system of Rudolph Steiner, its founder. Steiner's view of history is of particular importance, says Kristiansen:

He lays out history in a cosmogony which deals with the development of humanity through a fall from grace forward toward a spiritual existence. History is an individuation [sic], a process of becoming, where the human being, through a slow and gradual evolution, becomes a spiritual being. (Kristiansen 29)

Kristiansen outlines how, in the system of Anthroposophy, the earth goes through seven stages of development referred to as "Saturn, Sun, Moon, Earth, Jupiter, Venus and Vulcan." Man, in parallel, has moved through seven incarnations which go by the same names. In the Saturn period, Man's physical body is not united with his ethereal body. This happens in the Sun stage. During the Moon period, the "astral" body joins the other two. During the Earth period, Man's "ego" or "self" develops, adding a fourth aspect to his existence. Now the spiritual world is able to go to work on the physical world. The spiritual self emerges, and will reach completion during the Jupiter period. In the Venus period the transformations created by the ethereal body will bring forth the "life-spirit," and the whole progression will finally result in "spiritual man" in the Vulcan period (30-31). Man's development during the Earth period is further subdivided into seven
stages—the Lemurian, the Atlantean and the Aryan bring us up to human beings of the present. The Lemurs are human beings, but not really to be distinguished from animals (They had gills and fins). "They had no memory and no language," writes Kristiansen (33). Yet they developed the human trait of being able to choose. The first era of freedom arrives when Lucifer gives them this ability. The Lemurs, though, chose evil instead of good, and so went under. The Atlanteans develop a mental life and a world of logic that draws Man yet further from the spiritual world to earthly things (34). When the materialistic culture of the Atlanteans goes under, their descendants in Europe and Asia—the Aryans--further develop thought into science and mathematics, using once again the freedom bequeathed to the earliest human beings. Man has now developed to the point where he can either choose a new spirituality, or sink deeper into this new age of unprecedented materialism (35). Needless to say, Bjørneboe still sees his fellow "little bears" trapped in the animalistic Lemur stage. It looks in fact, if we keep the Anthroposophic system in mind, like a regression: for the little bears have become a people without song, dance, religion.

3 Steiner Lem, in his study, Bjørneboes menneskesyn i Frihetens øyeblikk--the insights of which I am occasionally indebted to in this chapter--finally suggests that the narrator of the novel adopts a "morality" to oppose the false morality reigning in the world (60). I am, however, unable to find anything to justify this--not in Moment of Freedom at any rate. Received morality and values of Western culture are under attack from all direction. No "values" are posited in their place: only a means to finding new values.

4 Willy Dahl, a champion of social and other realisms in literature in Norway, was rarely willing to give Bjørneboe the benefit of the doubt when he took chances. In the end, expressing an admiration for the spirit of his work, he gives him a grudging place in modern Norway's literary pantheon: that is more than Bjørneboe is accorded in Edvard Beyer's revised Norsk Litteraturhistorie. (Dahl 107-13)

5 Bjørneboe's ideas about the fundamental linkage of ritual, the trial and the drama foreshadow a growing body of thought, most cogently drawn together in René Girard's La Violence et la sacré (1972). Girard posits the notion that perfect equality, the removal of the idea of "degree" in society, brings the onset of the "sacrificial crisis," which brings itself the threat of an endless cycle of violence and retribution, which can only be resolved by the sacrifice of a neutral individual. This phenomenon is recreated in the absolutely equally weighted bouts between the antagonists in Tragedy. Girard describes the tragic crisis in terms of a sacrificial crisis: there is an
absolute symmetry created between opponents in scenes of conflict (agons) in Tragedy:

[T]he core of the drama remains the tragic dialogue; that is the fateful confrontation during which the two protagonists exchange insults and accusations with increasing earnestness and rapidity....

The symmetry of the tragic dialogue is perfectly mirrored by the stychomythia, in which the two protagonists address one another in alternating lines. In tragic dialogue hot words are substituted for cold steel. But whether violence is physical or verbal, the suspense remains the same. The adversaries match blow for blow, and they seem so evenly matched that it is impossible to predict the outcome of the battle. (44)

Girard sees this as a balancing of the scales, not of justice, but of violence, and says that Hölderlin had already found a term for this—"Gleichgewicht."

6 Steiner Lem's work adopts this premise.

7 Isaac Grünwald, a Jewish-German painter, and disciple of Matisse.

8 "Om formyndermennesket", in Vi som elsket Amerika (11-14). The term has become more of a household word since Bjrøneboe. It translates roughly as "guardian-type," and has connotations of "moral guardian," but can refer to political and judicial guardians as well. It is the type upon which hierarchical society depends for its existence. See also the section of eleven essays in Norge mitt Norge entitled "Formynderne."

9 Lem suggests that the Red City with four gates is part of stock Jungian symbolism, and signifies something specific for the individual psyche—the self at the point where the conscious and unconscious meet (32). We are proceeding on the assumption that it means something more than that, that it is an image with meaning for historical man.

10 A lengthy discussion of Bjrøneboe's view of illness, particularly clinical depression and alcoholism, was contributed to the volume Synet på Sykdom by Halfdan Kierulf, published by the University of Oslo's Section for Medical History. This passage is among those cited.

11 The form of depression Bjrøneboe describes is not one of passivity. It is active, as if one is being attacked by something from the outside. Bjrøneboe came to associate the leopard with depression, a beast which represented the sins of incontinence for Dante. We might, then, look at the circles reserved for the sins of
incontinence in Dante's hell for a comparable description. When Dante and Virgil arrive at the second circle of Hell—the first circle of "the incontinent"—they are greeted by Minos: "0 tu, che vieni al doloroso ospizio," ("0 thou that comest to the house of pain" [5.16]). In the 3rd circle, the "gluttonous"—those who lived without reciprocity or communication, not simply the greedy—are drenched in turbulent waters, mud and filth, while the many-headed hound Cerberus flays the flesh off the tormented souls (6.7-19). This imagery contains most all the elements we find in Bjørneboe's description of depression, which culminates in the words, "There is nothing outside of me, which is Hell." The missing element is the rivers of blood, which can also be found in Dante in Canto 12, in the circle of violence or bestiality—the "sins of the Lion" (Sayers 146). The violent are immersed in a river of blood for their crimes, an image of guilt that has no match for precision (12.46-55). Bjørneboe's depiction is not a classic melancholia, but a form of violence, as if the victim is being attacked. This victim, as we shall see, does not set himself apart from the guilt shared by the worst tyrants named in the History of Bestiality.

12 Kierulf evaluates the idea of sickness-awareness, as a prerequisite to cure, as an important insight into the process of cure.

13 Cf. Dostoyevsky's The Double:
The man now sitting opposite Mr Golyadkin was Mr Golyadkin's horror, he was Mr Golyadkin's shame, he was Mr Golyadkin's nightmare of the previous day; in short, he was Mr Golyadkin himself—not the Mr Golyadkin who now sat in his chair with his mouth gaping and the pen frozen in his grasp; not the one who liked to keep in the background and bury himself in the crowd; not, finally, the one whose demeanor said so clearly, "Leave me alone and I'll leave you alone ..." (177)

14 Here Bjørneboe shares common ground with his British contemporary, Edward Bond. In some of Bond's most important plays, such as Narrow Road to the Deep North, Saved, Lear and The Wars trilogy, the point of departure is the betrayal of trust of children by an adult world that has lost the link to its own humanity—in both capitalist and revolutionary societies.

15 Novalis's most important work, the novel Heinrich von Oftertingen, is structured in a fashion comparable to Moment of Freedom, and comparable to the whole trilogy for that matter. The story of Heinrich's spiritual ripening as a poet and seer is made up of episodes that stand as autonomous units: anecdotes, dialogues, lectures from his
various mentors, parables and literary fairy tales or Kunstmärchen. It too is a story of the growth of a soul from the seeds of personality in confrontation with the world, and the growth of that soul toward a greater soul. In the unfinished second part, Novalis poses a question which will be of central importance to Bjørneboe as well. If moral values ("Tugend" or "virtue") are not to be preached or inherited from the past, where are they to be found? The answer for Novalis is—they are to be found in action, in spontaneous choice—in the moment:

Es gibt nur eine Tugend—den reinen, ernsten Willen, der im Augenblick der Entscheidung unmittelbar sich entschliesst und wählt. In lebendiger, eigentümlicher Unteilbarkeit bewohnt es und beseelt es das zärtliche Sinnbild des menschlichen Körpers und vermag alle geistigen Gliedmassen in die wahrhafteste Tätigkeit zu versetzen. (198)

The moment of nausea or vertigo described by Nietzsche is that faced by the figure of Tragedy in antiquity—dionysian man looking into the abyss of meaninglessness, of the Absurd:

Die Verzückung des dionysischen Zustandes mit seiner Vernichtung der gewöhnlichen Schranken und Grenzen des Daseins enthält nämlicl während seiner Dauer ein letargisches Element, in das sich alles persönlich in der Vergangenheit Erlebte eintaucht. So scheidet sich durch diese Kluft der Vergessenheit die Welt der alltäglichen und der dionysischen Wirklichkeit voneinander ab. Sobald aber jene alltägliche Wirklichkeit wieder ins Bewusste tritt, wird sie mit Ekel als solche empfunden; eine asketische, willenverneinende Stimmung ist die Frucht jener Zustände. In diesem Sinne hat der dionysische Mensch Ähnlichkeit mit Hamlet: beide haben einmal einen wahren Blick in das Wesen der Dinge getan, sie haben erkannt, und es ekelt sie zu handeln; denn ihre Handlung kann nichts am ewigen Wesen der Dinge ändern, sie empfinden es als lächerlich oder schmachvoll, dass ihnen zugemutet wird, die Welt, die aus den Fugen ist, wieder einzurichten. Die Erkenntnis tötet das Handeln, zum Handeln gehört das Umschleiertsein durch die Illusion—das ist die Hamletlehre.... (Werke 41-42)

Nietzsche continues to outline the condition more precisely, and describes the experience of the individual with the words "it nauseates him":

Jetzt verfährt kein Trost mehr, die Sehnsucht geht über eine Welt nach dem Tode, über die Götter selbst hinaus, das Dasein wird, samt seiner gleissenden Widerspiegung in den Göttern oder in einem unsterblichen Jenseits, vereint. In der Bewusstheit der einmal geschauten Wahrheit sieht jetzt der Mensch überall nur das Entsetzliche oder Absurde des Seins, jetzt versteht er das Symbolische im Schicksal der
Ophelia, jetzt erkennt er die Weisheit des Waldgottes Silen: es ekelt ihn. (41)

17 Roquentin, in Sartre's La Nausée, sits on a bench, and looks not into a literal abyss, but the gaping abyss that is left where once values, names, concepts, e.g., all meaning stood. The narrative leads to the moment where he sees all things deprived of their names, and reality becomes slippery, elusive, viscous:

Et puis voilà: tout d'un coup, c'était là, c'était clair comme le jour: l'existence s'était soudain dévoilée. Elle avait perdu son allure inoffensive de catégorie abstraite: c'était la pâte même des choses, cette racine était pétrie dans de l'existence. Ou plutôt la racine, les grilles du jardin, le banc, le gazon rare de la pelouse, tout ça s'était évanoui; la diversité des choses, leur individualité n'était qu'une apparence, un vernis. Ce vernis avait fondu, il restait des masses monstrueuses et molles, en désordre--nues, d'une effrayante et obscure nudité. (179-80)

He begins to sense that his existence and all others are "de trop," adding "je pensais sans mots, sur les choses, avec les choses" (181). The abyss of meaning Sartre is confronting here resembles that which Bjørneboe depicts in the Roman catacombs, perhaps more than the one on the cliff.

18 Strindberg's experience, described in Tjänstekvinnans son, is one of youth, rather than one of maturity as in the two examples above. It is this experience which can turn a mind from worldly preoccupations to a preoccupation with recapturing the world in art. When, as a boy, he was training in the sharpshooters' youth organization, he found himself suddenly atop a steep cliff, with the Stockholm archipelago in view below. Describing this in the thoughts of his autobiographical persona Johann, he writes:

That picture impressed him like the rediscovery of a country seen in beautiful dreams or in a preceding existence, one he believed in but did not know anything about.... This was his ideal landscape, the true environment of his own nature; craggy granite islands, overgrown with spruce trees, scattered across wide stormy bays, with the boundless sea as their background, seen from a proper distance. (qtd. in Lagerkrantz 27)

19 Octavio Paz, in his The Labyrinth of Solitude, discusses the ritual elements of Mexican culture that seem designed to heighten awareness of death. To live with death awareness is to be aware of a time which is not linear, but mythic. This notion dominates the work of many contemporary Latin American writers—the clearest case
being that of Borges. Bjørneboe does not seem to have been closely acquainted with the writers of the "boom" period in Latin America—then just beginning. There are points of linkage, however. In the case of Borges, Bjørneboe shares with him the profound influence of German romanticism.

20. See note 18 above. A prominent symptom of the nausea Sartre describes is this increasing sense of disorientation, and the catacombs and the cliff dream in Moment of Freedom describe two different aspects of that disorientation. For Bjørneboe, it is in one case nausea, and in the other, vertigo.

21. Stillheten was received with considerably more warmth than the second book of the trilogy, and he was given the Norwegian Critics' Prize for the third volume in 1973.

22. The word for Superior, "Overlegen", is highly ambiguous here (KT 19). To be "overlegen" is both to be "superior" and to be "Chief Physician."

23. The essay "De Sade" is published in Bøker og mennesker, and served originally as Bjørneboe's introduction to his translation of Justine. See Donatien-Alphonse-Francois de Sade. Justine eller Dødens ulykker, trans. Jens Bjørneboe, (Oslo: Pax, 1970). Bjørneboe's recounting of the torture of Damien is not the first in literature: Sade's was. A very similar account is cited at length in the opening chapter of Michel Foucault's Surveiller et punir.

24. Foucault writes of the late 1700s and early 1800s:

Beneath the humanization of the penalties, what one finds are all those rules that authorize, or rather demand, "leniency," as a calculated economy of the power to punish. But they also provoke a shift in the point of application of this power: it is no longer the body, with the ritual play of excessive pains, spectacular brandings in the ritual of the public execution; it is the mind or rather a play of representations and signs circulating discreetly but necessarily and evidently in the minds of all. It is no longer the body, but the soul, said Mably. And we see very clearly what he meant by the term: the correlative of a technique of power. Old "anatomies" of punishment are abandoned. (101)

25. Once again, Bjørneboe touches on some crucial points that will be elucidated later by René Girard in La Violence et le sacré. Interestingly, Girard's description of the pharmakos matches Bjørneboe's description of the role of the executioner almost point for point:
On the one hand he is a woebegone figure, an object of scorn who is also weighed down by guilt: a butt for all sorts of gibes, insults, and of course, outbursts of violence. On the other hand, we find him surrounded by a quasi-religious aura of veneration; he has become a sort of cult object. (95)

He adds, in a passage that echoes Bjørneboe's idea of the executioner from the age of enlightenment on:

[T]he word pharmakon in classical Greek means both poison and the antidote for poison, both sickness and cure--in short, any substance capable of perpetrating a very good or very bad action.... The pharmakon is thus a magic drug or a volatile elixir, whose administration had best be left by ordinary men in the hands of those who enjoy special knowledge and exceptional powers--priests, magicians, shamans, doctors and so on. (95)

Bjørneboe read Gallo's book, Maximilien Robespierre: Histoire d' une solitude, in the German translation. The book makes use of the calendar of the French revolution for chapter headings--perhaps indicating that Bjørneboe read it prior to the writing of Kruttårnet where he does the same thing. Gallo tells the story of Robespierre's childhood, as we get it in condensed form in Stillheten. It also emphasizes Robespierre's reputation as "der Unbestechliche"--also stressed by Bjørneboe.

Benjamin writes, in the essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History":

Materialistic historiography ... is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes it into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history--blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the life work.... The nourishing fruit of the historically understood contains time as a precious but tasteless seed. (Benjamin 262-63)

See Kaj Skagen's discussion of what he, perhaps a bit too simply, calls Bjørneboe's "social individualism" in Jens Bjørneboe om seg selv (80).

Fredrik Wandrup suggests that he saw the young as
the hope of the times, and thought he could serve as a kind of guide for the "generation without fathers":

But desperation takes hold of him all the stronger with the years. The History of Bestiality is hardly uplifting. He realizes that he has to take a new tack if he is going to be able to give something to the "somewhat touchingly devoted young readers" who come to him. (198)

Wandrup quotes further: "What can I give them to conquer hopelessness and chaos?" (198).

Lem suggests at one point that Moment of Freedom is not, by its very nature, about to prescribe what kind of moral stand a reader should take. It is set up to leave the reader with a terrible set of unresolved contradictions that will lead to something experiential, which will lead him to a deeper moral foundation for his life: "a short, little moment of freedom" (60).

Dorothy Sayers has delineated Dante's bestiary in the commentary to her famous translation. She asserts that the leopard, the lion and the she-wolf in the opening canto can be seen respectively as Lust, Pride and Avarice, but more importantly, they represent three main types of sin which lead to Hell: "The ... Leopard is the image of the self-indulgent sins—Incontinence; the fierce Lion, of the violent sins—Bestiality; the She-Wolf of the malicious sins, which involve Fraud(75). The sins of "incontinence" can be said to be those of self-indulgence, and it is most certainly in these circles that alcoholics and depressives find themselves. Bjørneboe's description of depression, cited above, is one of self-absorption.

Dante's middle region of Hell, or Nether Hell, is reserved for the "sins of the lion"—of heresy and bestiality (See Sayers 75; 177).

FOUR / ILLUSION UNMASKED

The formula was expounded by Richard Schechner in his Essays on Performance Theory. It underscores the simultaneous existence in the theater of "here and now" experience and "there and then" events—and even the clash between the two. It is a concept that describes the single most important element of the post-Brechtian revolution in theater and performance.

Nietzsche's view in Die Geburt der Tragödie is often
disputed, but cannot be altogether dispensed with.

3 Bergson's thesis in *Le rire* lends weight to the idea that the form which Brecht adopted was first and foremost a comic form. Both thinkers concerned themselves with the uses of "distancing" as the cornerstone of their theory of theater.

4 Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* anatomizes more than anything else world drama. It demonstrates how the winter Mythos of Irony and Satire merges with the spring Mythos of Comedy (163-86). Frye does not make reference to Brecht or Bergson, but these three theoreticians tend to corroborate each other's thinking on the functions of comedy, satire, farce and irony.

5 In his famous essay, "The Modern Theater is the Epic Theater" (*Brecht on Theater* 33-42), the primary difference between Comedy and Tragedy is seen to be the difference between an experience in which the public merges with the event or is distanced from it. Brecht acknowledged the primacy of "pleasure" in the theater experience in his much later "A Short Organum for Theater," while emphasizing what he saw as the flawed premise of Tragedy:

The theater as we know it shows the structure of society (represented on the stage) as incapable of being influenced by society (in the auditorium).... Shakespeare's great solitary figures, bearing on their breast the star of their fate, carry through with irresistible force their futile and deadly outbursts; they prepare their own downfall; life, not death, becomes obscene as they collapse; the catastrophe is beyond criticism. (189)

6 See chapter 3, note 8 on "formyndermennesket".

7 Bjørneboe's correspondence, which has not been published, contains numerous letters to and from artists he met during the experience at the Berliner Ensemble. Among these are Manfred Wekwerth, Carl Weber, Hans Dieter Hosalla.

8 Brecht was apparently given a copy of *Nederlaget* to read while living in exile in Denmark, where Grieg was widely known (Danish is so close to what was then the standard "bokmål" Norwegian, that writers from either country could be read in the other without translation). Ruth Berlau, Brecht's closest collaborator during most of the period, was Danish and knew the work. According to Ronald Hayman, in his *Brecht: A Biography*, Berlau served at the front in Spain with Grieg (202). Grieg was at the time virtually Norway's national poet. A communist and a close confidant of the king, he was widely known in anti-fascist cultural circles throughout Europe. In his play, he shows not only the terrible contradictions faced by the Paris
Commune, but the contradictions inside it. The individual the Commune has designated to suppress its enemies, Rigault, is shown by Grieg in a degraded state, a victim of his office. The revolution needs someone to kill for it, and yet despises terror. Rigault is the one chosen for the thankless task. The contradictions inherent in his duties drive him to seek vulgar self-reward and a decadance in which the imperative to defend the revolution is all that is left of any ideals which once were there. The issue is not thrust forward in Brecht's version—where the issue is feeding the people versus the ideals of the revolution. The central theme Brecht keeps is the way the little man brings about his own defeat by not being able to adopt the "big" man's way of thinking when he gets power. Brecht also pared down the lyricism of Grieg's text. Hayman writes that in Berlin, in 1949, Brecht proposed Nederlaget for production, but on rereading it instructed Helene Weigel "not to let anyone see a script, and set to work with Berlau in rewriting it" (334).}

9 See the discussion of "med-lidelse" and Bjørneboe's use of doubles to put across his idea of compassion in Chapter three.

10 Strindberg has required some rescuing from his reputation—and various commentators have stepped forward in the last decade to do so. In August Strindberg Olof Lagerkrantz posits the idea that Strindberg was a writer with method, and his life—or "biography"—did not dominate what he wrote, but on the contrary, he used his life consciously—to his own and others' discomfort and pain—to gather material for his writing. Jan Myrdal in Strindberg och Balzac goes even further. He portrays the methodical writer putting in his 6-7 hours per day: a cultural radical, a mind capable of penetrating sociological studies such as his report on French peasants; a socialist who turned to religion, believing religion was something one needed like medicine.

11 The essay Bjørneboe refers to as "The Star Actor" (OT 31) is in fact part of Strindberg's open letters to his theater company at the Intimate Theater: Öppna brev till Intima Teatern, in Samlade Skrifter, ed. John Landquist, (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1914) vol. 50. He may, however, be referring to an excerpt published elsewhere.

12 See Lagerkrantz: "[H]e declared that socialism as a doctrine was infused with the spirit of Christianity, even though individual Socialists still had not seen the light" (365).

13 See Chapter Two on the suit against Ole Storm and the newspaper Politiken for statements that his work was untrue and speculative, as well as Carl Madsen's book about
the trial: En Litteraer Proces.

14 "[I] regard Semmelweis basically as the first serious attempt in the "History of Freedom" (Ringness 23).

15 The pirate edition of Røde Emma was published in Danish by Forlaget Bjørnsons Grav in 1976. It was withdrawn from the shelves after a protest from Bjørneboe's estate. Decidedly a piece of epic theater which traced Goldman's political career in the US, when completed it would have embodied her confrontation with the Soviet state as well. Bjørneboe worked on the early draft in English, utilizing Goldman's memoirs.

16 The children's plays are published in a collection of writings from his years at the Steiner School, Under en mykere himmel. "Ljuslägen" is based upon a story by Swedish writer Selma Lagerlöf.

17 According to Wandrup the play was first accepted by Oslo Nye Teater in 1961. Bjørneboe then pulled out. The same thing happened with a Finnish theater in 1963 (123). Ingen har sett oss was also on the boards to be reworked later, when Bjørneboe began to see hard times ahead for epic forms of theater. In a letter to Carl Weber (24 Feb. 1971) he writes:

Ich habe im Schubfach ein kleines, erotisches Stückchen--die Geschichte zwischen einem 20-jähriges Mädchen und einem älternden Shriftsteller, eigentlich eine Art Strindberg komödie. Ich möchte es einmal bearbeiten, noch obszöner machen.... Jedenfalls, das Stück könnte furchtbar komisch inszeniert werden, und gleichzeitig viel interessantes klinisches Material bringen.... Ich habe diesem Stück ... "KEINER HAT UNS GESEHEN", das Gefühl, dass es einmal genau so viel Geld einbringen wird, wie "WITHOUT A STITCH".

18 The direct accusations concerning the suicide by hanging of inmate Kjell Hansen in solitary--when physicians had stated he could not tolerate incarceration--topped off the series of articles which are reprinted in Vi som elsket Amerika. See "Anklaget mot fengselstyret," Dagbladet 24 February 1971. See also "Åpent brev til Justisministeren," Dagbladet 2 Feb. 1961.

19 Bjørneboe and Axel Kielland describe Krog's involvement in the appendices to Til lyke med dagen, in Samlede skuespill 69-79.

20 The first production of Fugleelskerne by a mainstream theater was directed by Carl Weber at the National Theater in Oslo. Music was written for it by Hans Dieter Hosalla. Manfred Wekwerth considered the play for
the Berliner Ensemble as well. There is an implication in one of his letters to Bjørneboe, couched as a personal criticism, that the play would not quite fit ideologically at his theater—perhaps poking a hole in the generally accepted idea that the Berliner Ensemble was given carte blanche by the government in the DDR to do as it pleased. Wekwerth praises the script when he says it "ist wahrscheinlich das bitterste Stück gegen die Verbürgerlichung des Proletariats." He writes:


The earliest production of Fugleelskerne was by Grotowsky student Eugenio Barba and the newly established Odinteatret in 1966. Productions followed later by Riksteatret, Norway's touring theater, and another in the Netherlands. A curious footnote is that the Oslo production was invited to the Venice International Theater Festival, but the National Theater declined. When the Venice Festival offered to pay all costs—travelling expenses and transportation of the sets, or to have them built anew in Venice—the leadership of the theater once again turned down the offer. Bjørneboe was embittered by this inexplicable reaction to the first opportunity to get Norwegian drama into an international forum in many, many years.

21 In 1966, when Eugenio Barba first arrived in Norway, where he formed Odinteatret, his first production with the theater company which was soon to be at the forefront of the European avant-garde was Ornitofilene, an early stage adaptation of The Bird Lovers. Reports from people who were in attendance indicate that the final scene created obvious turmoil among the public, with not a few responding with fury.

22 Jardar Skaadel reported in Arbeiderbladet (10 Jan. 1969) on the Finnish "World Premiere," and assured readers it had been a major success. Professor Sven Krohn wrote of that production: "Semmelweis is in my opinion the most important play that has been produced in Åbo for a long time. As an artistic presentation it does credit and honor to the author Bjørneboe...." Professor Oscar Nilcha wrote: "It is the truths of the day which Semmelweis throws
in our face. Faultlessly, and with convincing striking power. Go see the play.... Each one of us needs to learn to wash his hands." Program: National Theatret, (Oslo: 1969-70 Season). The play was produced in Finnish during this period at Porin Theater as well.

23 Céline's Semmelweis is a good soul in a world of relentless evil. Therefore, he does not know the art of compromise:

Où Semmelweis s'est brisé, il fait peu de doutes que la plupart d'entre nous auraient réussi par simple prudence, par d'élémentaires délicatesses. Il n'avait pas, ou négligeait, semble-t-il, le sens indispensable des lois lutiles de son époque, de toutes les époques d'ailleurs, hors desquelles la bêtise est une force indomptable.

Humainement, c'était un maladroit. (593)

24 Céline himself resorts to Romantic methods when he depicts floridly paranoid Semmelweis cutting into an infected cadaver and plunging his scalpel recklessly into it, cutting himself with a broad stroke ("Sa blessure saigne. Il crie. Il menace. On le désarme. On l'entoure. Mais il est trop tard..."). Here Semmelweis's own Sturm und Drang gesture results in his death (619).

25 Marta Vestin, artistic director of Stockholm's Fritatearn, had previously worked together with Norwegian author Johan Borgen to create the production Frigjöringsdag. She initiated a correspondence with Bjørneboe to see if he had some material for her company. They began an exchange on the previously published one-act, Amputasjon. The acting ensemble at Fritatearn was comprised of people willing to do voice and body training of the most disciplined sort. The group paid a visit and improvised on the material. "This got him going," reports Vestin. The actors wrote stories about their characters' pasts during the process. It was then that Bjørneboe introduced the sequence of flashbacks to contrast with the brutal here-and-now activity in the theater. Another result of the collaboration was an increasing differentiation between the politics of the two surgeons—so that Fortinbras expressed himself through the slogans of western-style democracy, and Vivaldi by means of the East-block, Leninist type. Some of these changes in "sloganeering" did not make it into the final Pax edition of the play, in which the apparent ideological difference between the two maniacal medical men is less well delineated. The collaboration between the company and Bjørneboe lasted from the 11th of January, 1970, when Bjørneboe gave his first interview on the project, to the 3rd of April. The style of the performance was "farce, in Molière's style" according to Vestin. But stylization slowly gave way during the 1 1/2 hours to a closer more brutal imitation of reality. The
giant horse syringes grew smaller, more real and vicious looking, until—in the scene where a needle is used to kill Forglegemegei—a real hypodermic needle was inserted under the skin of a real actor's belly. To build towards this "clinical" reality, actors did training with a doctor and nurse team to get the details down-pat. The theater was set up as an "operating theater," which lent itself both to theatricality and verisimilitude. Vestin found it unnecessary to use "sounds" of limbs falling into buckets, as the visual impact was sufficiently horrific. Vestin: "In the kind of theater I do, the audience is participating in the event. Violence is very dangerous because the audience thinks, 'Oh—that poor actor.' Then they pull out of the play." Bjørneboe later invited Vestin to work on his film project about violence during the Viking era, Håvard Isafjordings saga. Vestin did not think the naturalism of film violence would work for her: "My violence is imagery. It is symbolic." (Marta Vestin, personal interview, 12 March 1986.)

Two English language productions ensued: one by the Norwegian "Thesbiteatret" in Rotterdam (Dagbladet 25 June 1977), and another in Canberra, Australia in 1977, which got an "overwhelmingly positive reception" according to translator Solrun Hoaas (Dagbladet 20 June 1977). The latter production was also performed at a seminar on Science and Society, and was attended by 720 doctors and nurses.

See note 25 above, on the origins of the flashback scenes.

FIVE / LAST WORKS: CONCLUSIONS

1 Hans Jaeger was, along with painter and novelist Kristian Krogh, the center of the Kristiania Bohème in Norway, from which other important Scandinavian cultural figures emerged—among them Edvard Munch. Author of works like From A Kristiania Bohème (Fra Kristiania bohême), and The Bible of Anarchism (Anarkiets bibel), Jaeger's belief that anarchism would be the natural way of life for humankind at a certain stage in its development, led him to conclude that the spread of consciousness should be the primary activity of all anarchists (Wandrup 190-91). It was the literary strategy of the pamphleteer, rather than that of a politician. To enhance the spread of this truth, to help shed the habit of lies, he also adopted the technique of "writing" his life, a technique adopted as well by Bjørneboe—and, it might be added, also embraced by
Jaeger's anarchistic contemporary, August Strindberg.

2 Quoted from the English translation of L'homme révolté by Anthony Bower, The Rebel (New York: Vintage, 1956) 24. This applies to all other passages quoted from this work in English.

3 Camus, discussing Nietzsche's lapse in Der Wille zur Macht, writes: "From the moment that assent was given to the totality of human experience, the way was open to others, who far from languishing, would gather strength from lies and murder" (76). This is reminiscent of Bjørneboe's assertion that man's awareness of his freedom preceded his development of a consciousness of death "so that the little bears in fact discovered that they, unpunished, could do whatever they pleased" (FO 155). Cf. Camus 101-03: "[M]an's greatest liberty consisted only in building the prison of his crimes...."

4 Skagen continues:

Never has he been so close to letting that final judgment fall as in The Silence. I believe that he wanted very strongly to be able to do it. He must have often wished to take his final and irreversible farewell, motivated by a personally felt bitterness on account of the whole cultural complex from which he never could escape. (132)

Skagen's conclusion is that the total condemnation of Western culture would have made things simple—it would have been a matter then of finding hope in other cultures, third world cultures. Skagen's assessment is that at the end of the day Bjørneboe saw the sickness as something deeper than that of a particular culture: that it runs through the entire order of things.

5 These words are the culminating lines of Typhoon (226). Bjørneboe's description of his own Captain Anderson make Anderson an even less likely candidate for heroism: "It was obvious that the man hadn't even fantasy or mental life enough to be afraid. He was a tower of massive, phlegmatic dullness" (89).

6 For Conrad the gestalt of the Captain is also representative of something we seek for through the chaos of unexpected crises—a gestalt one assembles through the flux of such crises: it is a figure of faith in the midst of the storm, as in Typhoon:

All at once, in a revolt of misery and despair, he formed the crazy resolution to get out of that. But as soon as he commenced his wretched struggles, he discovered that he had become somehow mixed up with a face, an oilskin coat, somebody's boots. He clawed ferociously, all these things
in turn, and finally was himself caught in the firm clasp of a pair of stout arms. He returned the embrace closely round a thick, solid body. He had found his Captain." (181)

7 Conrad writes, in Heart of Darkness:

The mind of man is capable of anything—because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future. What was there after all? Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion, valour, rage—who can tell?—but truth—truth stripped of its cloak of time. Let the fool gape and shudder—the man knows, and can look on without a wink. But he must at least be as much of a man as these on the shore. He must meet that truth with his own true stuff—with his own inborn strength. Principles won't do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags—rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No, you want a deliberate belief.... [F]or good or evil mine is the speech which can't be silenced. (69)

8 Bjørneboe's schedule during work on a novel was to write from 11 a.m. to 5 a.m. with little or no sleep (MHH 32). He would invariably awaken after 2-3 hours sleep:

From Moment of Freedom onwards these conditions became chronic; have lasted now for more than ten years. Each book has been the same hell. It is quite clear that no one can handle something like that over a long span of time. After a period of work the next break-down would come. Then the next and then the next. After completing the writing job, a total collapse. (36)

9 Bjørneboe's letter to Carl Weber, 24 February 1971, touches in several places on the difficulties of getting works published across international borders:

Additionally, Norton eventually dispensed with their stock, and the book is no longer available for purchase in English. Possibly contributing to this outcome was the death of Bjørneboe's agent in New York, as well as the fact that the McCarran Walter Act was being employed against Bjørneboe—like so many other international intellectual and literary figures—so that he was effectively banned from US soil, and any promotional visits were always out of the question.

Ringness's NRK interview was published in Arken, edited by the Anthroposophy-oriented Kaj Skagen. As the interview was shown shortly after Bjørneboe's death, and was shortly thereafter published in a literary journal, it became a literary and cultural event beyond the scope originally intended.

Ringness himself reports that after his arrival with the cameraman on the island, without any alcohol in tow, the interview was denied until Ringness's assistant could take a voyage back to the mainland to get some. During the interview, bottles were kept under the table—even while Bjørneboe was dodging questions about his poem of renunciation, "Farvel bror Alkohol" (H. Ringness, personal interview, 29 Nov. 1986). Bjørneboe countered these questions by responding that he no longer drank three bottles of whiskey per day (Ringness 26).


Annette Hoff, personal interview, 7 January 1986.

Amundsens.

See Chapter 3. In much of his work syphilis is the literal disease which is also emblematic of the metaphysical sickness which has set great cultural figures apart in the West from the Renaissance onward.

Bjørneboe does not, however, have any real objection to formal experimentation, as long as it is not a defensive move by a writer:

Epigonism and fashionable trends are not plagiary or theft; they are just the dishonesty of laziness. When whole groups begin to write alike, and to use the same words, you are looking at collective falseness. One avoids having to show who he is.... He shows only his emptiness. (MHH 57)

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SCREENPLAYS


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