

ntamo TUULA HÖKKÄ (TOIM.) *Toiset ambivalentit äänet*

Toiset ambivalentit äänet

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Toiset ambivalentit äänet

Essays in Feminine Poetics in Nordic Countries

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ntamo, Helsinki

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Foreword

The plurification and liberation of poetry, started by Romanticism, continued with Modernism. In the essays of this book, six female scholars from Norway, Estonia, and Finland, each write about remarkable 20th Century female poets in her language, addressing their various poetics and poetic decisions. What these poets brought to poetry under transformation, how they wrote, what they had to give, what they stood against, what was their relation to the poetical tradition and influences of International Modernism.

In terms of time, the essays range from the 1930's to the end of the century. The International Modernism, with its Avantgardisms, forms a common background, while the different historical situations, and the World War Two – as a common factor – add variation to the picture. Because of the War, the social development in Estonia took a different form compared to the Nordic countries, also affecting the Estonian poetry and giving a different context to Modernism there.

Strong and independent female poets are very much part of the poetic tradition in all the countries involved.

In juxtaposing the poets, the book aims to show common points and features as well as differences – the richness of poetic cultures, and the other, ambivalent voices (“toiset ambivalentit äänet”).

Unni Langås writes about Eldrid Lunden (born 1940), one of the most important contemporary female poets in Norway who also displays a strong bend to experimentation, reflection, and teaching of poetry. Norwegian Gunvor Hofmo (1921–1995), and Finnish Eeva-Liisa Manner (1921–1995), covered by Sissel Furuseth and Tuula Hökkä respectively, came to live exactly the same years. Do they have something else in common as well – loneliness, the emotional tension behind Modernist-Formalist language? Ele Süvalep in her turn takes up Betti Alver (1906–1989) who in her poetics builds a live bridge from the Estonian 30's New Classicisms to the new poetries of the 60's. Auli Auväart writes about the work, prosody, and imagery of Estonian Debora Vaarandi (1916–2007), placing them against literary politics of successive decades. Finally, Anna Hollsten reviews Finnish Post-War children's literature in its twin orientation toward child and adult readerships.

A multi-lingual anthology allows small languages to be presented in original, or translated. The authors have been free in their choice of poets to cover, as well as the language of their essays.

Saatteeksi

Romantiikasta alkanut runouden ja poetiikan monimuotoistuminen ja vapautuminen jatkui modernismissa. Tämän kirjan artikkeleissa kuusi naistutkijaa Norjasta, Virosta ja Suomesta kirjoittaa kukin kielialueensa 1900-luvun merkittävistä naislyyrikoista ja heidän ratkaisuistaan runouden kirjoittamisessa. Mitä runoilijat toivat uudistuvaan runouteen, miten he kirjoittivat, mitä antoivat, mitä kritikoivat, mikä oli heidän suhteensa runotraditioon ja kansainvälisen modernismin vaikutekenttään.

Artikkelien aikajana ulottuu 1930-luvulta vuosisadan vaihteeseen. Tausalla on länsimainen modernismi avantgardismeineen ja kunkin maan erilaiset historialliset tilanteet, ja kaikille yhteinen sota. Sodan seurauksena muun pohjolan ja Viron yhteiskuntamuodot erkaantuivat, mikä vaikutti myös virolaiseen runoon ja kehitti modernismille toisen kontekstin.

Niin Norjan, Suomen kuin Viron perinteeseen kuuluvat vahvat ja itsenäiset naislyyrikot.

Asettamalla runoilijat rinnakkain teos näyttää kosketuskohtia, yhteisyyksiä ja erilaisuuksia, rikkaan runoskaalan, yllätykset ja toiset ambivalentit äänet.

Unni Langås kirjoittaa Eldrid Lundenista (s. 1940), joka on merkittävimpiä nykyajan naisrunoilijoita Norjassa, kokeilija, reflektioija ja runouden pedagogi. Norjalainen Gunvor Hofmo (1921–1995), josta Sissel Furuseth kirjoittaa, ja suomalainen Eeva-Liisa Manner (1921–1995), josta Tuula Hökkä kirjoittaa, ovat eläneet täsmälleen samat vuodet. Onko heillä muutakin yhteistä: yksinäisyys, tunteen jännite modernin muotokielen piilossa? Ele Süvalepin tarkastelun kohteena on Betti Alver (1906–1989), joka poetiikassaan luo elävän yhteyden 30-luvun Viron uusklassismin ja 60–70-luvun virolaisen uuden runon välillä. Auli Auväärt käsittelee virolaisen Debora Vaarandin (1916–2007) runoilijantyötä, poettista tekniikkaa ja kuvastoa eri vuosikymmenien kirjallista politiikkaa vasten. Anna Hollsten tarkastelee sodanjälkeisen suomalaisen lastenkirjallisuuden tapaa asettua kahtaallisesti aikuis- ja lapsilukijan välimaastoon.

Monikielinen antologia antaa pienille kielialueille mahdollisuuden esiintyä omalla kielellään tai käännettynä. Kirjoittajat ovat vapaasti valinneet runoilijansa ja artikkelinsa kielen.

Tuula Hökkä

Unni Langås

Eldrid Lunden's Poetry 1968 – 2000

An Introduction

Poetry and poetic writing can have different aspects and types of effects, and Eldrid Lunden is one of the persons in Norwegian literary life who manifest this diversity. Her main contribution consists of the nine volumes of poetry which made her a key figure in the last three decades of the 20th century. She has also worked as a teacher on various levels and since 1982 as head of, and later professor at the Academy of the Art of Writing in Bø, Telemark. In addition, she has written essays on literature and done editorial work in literary journals. Lunden's production is not overwhelmingly huge, and her voice does not reach the media too often, but through her writing and teaching she has gained a respect that can be judged not only in the response from critics and from prestigious awards, but not least from other and often younger authors. She is undoubtedly one of the most important poets of her generation, and by far the most eminent one among the women. In this article, I will describe and interpret her poetic oeuvre from my own point of view, but also in a dialogue with other readers. In this way I intend to elucidate both the specific quality of her poetry, and the broad influence and variety of reaction to her work and its impact.¹

Personal background and literary context

Eldrid Lunden was born in 1940 as the youngest child of five on a small farm in Naustdal in Sunnfjord. She had different jobs in the local area before she went to high school in Voss and later to Oslo. In 1973 she took her post-graduate degree in Nordic languages and literature at the University of Oslo, with the thesis *Kvar gjekk Nora? Individualisme og kvinnesyn i tre norske drama* (*Where did Nora go? Individualism and Concepts of Femininity in Three Norwegian Plays*). At this time she had no firm plans to become an au-

¹ Since this article was written, Eldrid Lunden has published her tenth volume of poetry, *Flokken og skuggen* (*The Flock and the Shadow*), 2005. In my forthcoming book on Lunden's poetry, I have included an interpretation of this book, cf. Unni Langås, *Dialog. Eldrid Lunden's Dikt* (*Dialogue. Eldrid Lunden's Poems*) 1968 – 2005, Unipub, Oslo 2007.

thor, but she got acquainted with other students with literary interests and became a part of the group that published the important literary journal *Profil*.

In 1960 the new buildings of the university had been completed, and most faculties moved away from downtown Oslo to Blindern. The new campus was a material sign of the student boom that took place during the 60's as a result of the big post-war generation and government investment in higher education. The effect of this development for the cultural scene was the influx of a new generation of highly educated authors and other artists from various social and geographical backgrounds. An increase in the number of women with a university degree and their growing participation in professional life was another result. Hers was the first generation for whom the doors to higher education were opened wide, Lunden later recalls.¹

Profil was a students' magazine which became the central medium for aesthetic discussions among young aspiring authors, and it turned out to be an important publishing channel for early attempts in fiction, criticism and essayistics for many writers. Among its contributors and editors were Dag Solstad, Einar Økland, Espen Haavardsholm, Tor Obrestad, Paal-Helge Haugen, Jan Erik Vold and Liv Køltzow. Eldrid Lunden published early writings in the journal; her first poems, which later were included in her debut book, appeared in volume 4, 1966. She also worked as co-editor in 1967 and 1968. It is probably correct to maintain, however, that the journal and the dynamic climate around it played a greater role as inspiration for her poetic thinking and creativity than as a longed-for receptor of a surplus of writing energy. According to Lunden herself, the *Profil* milieu was one of the most stimulating experiences during her years on campus, but she withdrew from the journal when it changed its ideology around 1970.²

A major topic in *Profil* was the attempt to elaborate a new aesthetic platform in opposition to the literary establishment. In this endeavour a recurring effort was made to investigate and come to terms with the concept of modernism. Espen Haavardsholm, Tor Obrestad and Dag Solstad wrote

1 Cf. Eldrid Lunden interviewed by Arild Stubhaug, "Om å få fram ei stemme," (On finding a voice) in *Basar* 2, 1978. Also published in Eldrid Lunden: *Kvifor måtte Nora gå? Nye essays og andre tekstar* (Why did Nora have to go? New essays and other texts), Aschehoug, Oslo 2004.

2 Op. cit.

articles where they more or less explicitly rejected contemporary Norwegian literature as out of touch in relation to Europe and called for a new experimental drive among the authors. Einar Økland (3/1967) defined the new generation as different in many ways and specified the change as a suspicion towards language, hereby meaning a rejection of the notion of transcendence between sign and thing, which resulted in an interest in structure, form and a play with signifiers. Part of this aesthetic renewal was also a new concept of subjectivity, where the 'I' no longer was seen as a consistent personality, but rather as a set of roles, attitudes or possibilities. In retrospect it is clear that the *Profil* revolt was a manifestation more of a desire to make a difference than a consistent ideology or aesthetics. The journal was a laboratory for experimental thought and writing, and its kind of modernism varied within the group and even from work to work by the very same author.

Regarding poetry, the situation was slightly different. The grand debate between modernists and traditionalists took place in the 1940's and 50's, as the Swedish "fyrptiotalism" (high modernism) was introduced in Norway by the poet, translator and critic Paal Brekke. There were also strong, modernist poets like Rolf Jacobsen, Tarjei Vesaas, Olav H. Hauge, Gunvor Hofmo, Stein Mehren and Georg Johannesen, who in very different ways challenged the public's lyrical taste and developed the genre in a Norwegian context. Jacobsen had already in the 1930's started a life-long concern with tensions between technology and nature, and Vesaas formulated the war experience. Hauge mixed vast international influence with poetry anchored in the (west) Norwegian landscape; Hofmo cultivated a poetic expressionism in the shadow of the war disaster, Mehren a symbolic imagery, and Johannesen a politically engaged poetry. With the new generation of poets in the 60's came first and foremost a sense of a new world and an opening of the poetic field. Jan Erik Vold made poetry popular with jazz-and-poetry performances; Paal-Helge Haugen introduced the Japanese haiku and investigated graphic styles, ready-mades and visual effects.

As sources of inspiration for Eldrid Lunden it is impossible not to include other female poets. Lunden explicitly refers to Edith Södergran as one of her earliest preferred poets; in 2001 she published an in-depth ana-

lysis of Södergran's work.¹ An important medium for the communication of poetic voices for several decades was the popular radio program 'Ønskediktet' (My favourite poem), which Lunden recalls having listened to. Most admired of all the poets in this program was Halldis Moren Vesaas, who like Lunden wrote 'Nynorsk', the language based on Norwegian dialects and Old Norse. Prominent poets in this Nynorsk tradition are Aslaug Vaa and Marie Takvam, both of whom must be counted among important forerunners of Lunden.² Outstanding female writers in 'Bokmål', the language based on Danish, are Inger Hagerup, Gunvor Hofmo, Astrid Hjertenæs Andersen, Astrid Tollefsen, Magli Elster and Kate Næss. These poets have different styles and tones, and do not belong to particular groups, except for their gender. This fact is not insignificant, though, not only because of the feminine identification and the female topics that they introduce, but also because of the gender consciousness as such. In poetry, as well as in essays, interviews and criticism, Lunden emphasises gender issues as a crucial concern in her own work.

Revolt

Ten years after her debut with *f.eks. juli* (e.g. July) in 1968, Eldrid Lunden states that the publication of her poems happened more or less by chance. The attention attracted by this first appearance was nevertheless positive and unforeseen. In her own eyes she had written poems about her misery, but the media treated her as a 'pop girl'. However, the 'success' did not encourage her to go on writing and publishing but rather the contrary, it seems, since seven years passed until her next volume appeared.

f.eks. juli is Lunden's revolt. Its poetics are significantly marked by a 'different' style; it has temperament, opposition, satirical and comical modalities as well as metaphorical diversity and surprise. The very title and the cover design signify an anti-symbolic and matter-of-fact attitude, since the technical abbreviation e.g. clashes with the conventionally poetic

1 Eldrid Lunden: "'Ett solens barn' – Edith Södergran på ny," in *Vinduet* 2–3, 2001. Also published in *Kvifor måtte Nora gå? Nye essays og andre tekstar*.

2 Lunden published "Det autentiske som prosjekt. Marie Takvams poesi 1952–1980. Ein kommentar" in *Norsk litterær årbok* 1981; also published in Eldrid Lunden: *Essays*, Det Norske Samlaget, Oslo 1982.

word July, and an expected colourful summer imagery is replaced by thick black-and-white lines framing fragile contours of a leaf.¹ The image and the contrasts conjure up impressions of conflict, of a collision that turns out to characterise not only this volume but following books as well. In the title poem, the sun is consequently not only the unambiguous benefactor of life, but also a rock-hard enemy:

f. eks. juli

Stikke ein djup arm
djupt i senete skogar
handa full av røter,

hive jord mot dirrande sola
suge sol frå dampande jordnatta,

på botnen av
eit barns veksande vindauga
små nåler i stim.
(13)²

(e.g. July

to stick a deep arm
deep into sinewy woods
hands full of roots

to throw earth at the quivering sun
to suck sun from the steaming earth-night

at the bottom of
a child's growing windows
a shoal of small needles)³

Presented as a child's memory, the poem signifies desire, anger and pain in quite concrete and partly animated images supported by alliteration and rhythm as musical effects. It hints at a wound, which here is mani-

1 The cover of *f.eks. juli* was designed by the outstanding Norwegian painter Per Kleiva.

2 All references to Eldrid Lunden: *Dikt i samling 1968–2000 (Collected Poems)*, Den Norske Bokklubben, Oslo 2001.

3 The translation of this and the following poems has been done by Annabelle Despard.

festes as a futile fight with nature, but is also accompanied by growing insight.

The volume consists of separate poems without epic coherence. Common motives are these sudden images of being hurt, often by knives, needles and other sharp tools that leave behind blood, loneliness and fear. This mood of suffering is integrated in images of landscape and animals, which are seldom clean or harmless. Stones are 'snapping', black wings are 'cutting', mountains 'fill' the body, and eaten apples are lying 'destroyed' in the grass. Pain inhabits nature, always.

Staffan Söderblom reflects on this violence in Lunden's work in an article where he pursues the motive of doors.¹ He comments on the poem "Morgon" (Morning), which he finds threatening, but also inadequate:

Morgon

Straum i stålet
tommel for egga
kaldøygd

dogg før nokon ting var
hendt
(18)

(Morning)

a charge through the steel
a thumb for the blade
cold-eyed

dew before anything had
happened)

The poem prepares for a dramatic scene, he writes, but then suddenly stops, as if in mid-poem, and thus lets the reader down. In "Ei dør" (A Door), it is the other way round; here something has happened before the poem:

1 Staffan Söderblom: "'Det som ein med rimelegheit kan vente seg' (av en dörr)" (Everything that you can fairly expect (from a door)), *Ord och bild*, 1/1995. The essay is also published in Ole Karlsen (ed.): *Store oskeflak av sol. Om Paal-Helge Haugens og Eldrid Lundens forfatterskap*, LNU/Cappelen, Oslo 1995.

Ei dør slår punktum
i dagen, slår skuggen
i rot mellom røter,
skræmer opp stilla
så du må ta fram
hendene,

ikkje snu deg, la sommaren
reise på landet,
tre og dører har same
rot,
hender er alltid på reise fot.
(8)

(A door marks full stop
in the day, beats the shadow
into root between roots
startles the silence
so you have to get out
your hands

don't turn round, let the summer
leave for the country,
trees and doors have the same
root,
hands are always afoot.)

Söderblom finds this technique 'conventional', and he connects the seven years of silence to a need for Lunden to reconsider this sort of unfulfilled communication. He does not call for more disclosure, as if there were an event to be told, but for more dialogue and a more open aesthetics. This attitude is nevertheless a recurring reaction from readers, also from other authors, even though Lunden changes her poetic method several times. Karin Moe interprets the phenomenon as the poet's way of protecting her own voice. She writes in an essay from 1997: "Det kan synast som der finst fleire strategiar for å verja den eigne stemma hos Eldrid Lunden. Minimalisme, vil somme seia. Kryptisme og gøymespel, vil andre istemma. Det dynamiske i teksten, at han ikkje er til å fanga med eitt eller få grep, er også ei utfordring. Andre vil sjå ein strategi i dette med eksempelet: det let seg ikkje gjera å etterapa meg, men kan eg, så kan du."¹ (It seems as if there

1 Karin Moe: "Eldrid Lunden på Lillehammer", in *Syn & Segn*, 4/1997.

are several strategies in order to protect her own voice in Eldrid Lunden. Minimalism, some will state. Cryptic writing and masquerade, others will assert. The dynamic text, the fact that it evades being captured by one or a few reading techniques, also represents a challenge. Others will see a strategy in the example as such: it isn't possible to imitate me, but if I can, you can, too.)

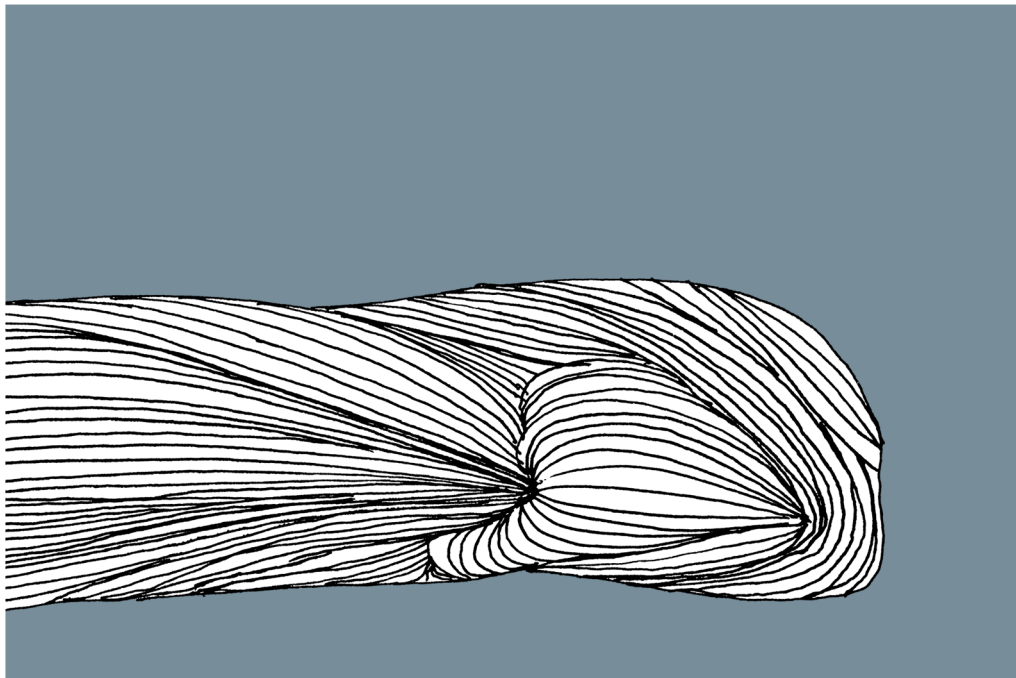
Jan Erik Vold characterises Lunden's debut in the following way: "Den første samlinga er ujamn. Det knappe, bitske uttrykket; fragment av barnesorg og vaksensorg; fjell og elv i Sunnfjordlandskap; mørke og disharmoni – dominerer."¹ (The first volume is uneven. The short, biting expression; fragments of childhood grief and adult grief; mountain and river in the Sunnfjord landscape; darkness and disharmony – dominate.) Einar Økland refers to authors who have a compact style and give the impression of pride of it: Look, how much I can say with a few words! Lunden's poems signify the opposite: I cannot say more now! "Eldrid Lundens dikt verkar ikkje samanpressa. Dei verkar snarare utpressa. Rivne ut or ein hug."² (Eldrid Lunden's poems do not seem compressed. Rather, they seem squeezed. Torn out from a soul.) The most important topics in Lunden's poetry Økland identifies as body awareness in a child, experience of a landscape in a child, sudden, adult perception of identity – disturbed by experiences, memories and insight, farewells, loneliness, contact. In sum, this produces an existential literature, Økland states. He is obviously right in describing f.eks. juli as an experimental project, an experiment in the poetic genre, where different methods and motives are being tested. This undertaking was probably necessary, though, in order to prepare for the more sophisticated aesthetics that Eldrid Lunden presented in her next three volumes.

Trilogy

Three thin volumes with a striking aesthetic similarity are what I call Eldrid Lunden's 'trilogy'. *Inneringa (Circumvented)*, 1975, *hard*, *mjuk (hard*,

1 Jan Erik Vold: "Eldrid Lunden", in *Syn & Segn*, 3/1990.

2 Einar Økland: "Å kjenne seg att" (To recognize oneself / the surroundings). Introduction to Eldrid Lunden: *Dikt i utval*, Bokklubbens lyrikkvenner, Det Norske Samlaget 1987.



Six female scholars, from Norway, Estonia, and Finland, address the work of remarkable 20th Century female poets in their languages – Unni Langås that of Eldrid Lunden, Sissel Furuseth of Gunvor Hofmo, Tuula Hökkä of Eeva-Liisa Manner, Ele Suvalep of Betti Alver, and Auli Auväärt of Debora Vaarandi, whereas Anna Hollsten writes about Finnish writers of childrens literature.

Against the background of International Modernism, with its various avangardes, and the history and culture of their countries, the scholars chart the dimensions, surprises, points in common as well as differences – the richness, and the other ambivalent voices ("toiset ambivalentit äänet") – of the female poetics in Northern Europe.

The anthology is multi-lingual, one of the essays being is in Norwegian, two in Finnish, one in English, and one in Estonian and English. The authors are specialists in the literature, and above all poetry, in their respective languages. The editor, Tuula Hökkä, Ph.D., is a renown scholar and promoter of Eeva-Liisa Manner's work.

