

# Scandinavian Studies

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*Scandinavian Studies* (ISSN 0036 5637) is a rigorously refereed scholarly journal published quarterly by the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study, 3003 JKHB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602 for \$50.00 per year. Second class postage paid at Provo, UT 84605-6118. POSTMASTER: Please send address corrections to *Scandinavian Studies*, 3003 JKHB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602.

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Communications about subscriptions, advertising, and membership should be addressed to the Secretary-Treasurer, SASS, 3003 JKHB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602-6118. Members of the Society receive each issue of *Scandinavian Studies*. The editorial and production office has generously been provided by the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies at Brigham Young University, R. Lanier Britsch, Director.

Cover photograph, a pendant from Gotland with gold filigree ornament, used by permission of the British National Museum.

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# Uncertain Centers Uncentered Selves

Postmodernism and the (re)Definition of  
Feminine in *Anna (jeg) Anna* and *Baby*<sup>1</sup>

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**K**LAUS RIFBJERG'S *Anna (jeg) Anna* (1969) and Kirsten Thorup's *Baby* (1973) engage the problematics of a female quest for personal identity, and the (re-)creation of a self defined in terms of itself in a male-dominated paternalistic society and literary tradition. In both novels, the women interrogate the discourses which structure and limit their lives. By means of their challenges, they are able to break through male-dominated modes of expression, write among them, and shatter the male projection of the feminine which holds the women imprisoned both in society and in the text itself. Although the works seemingly "center" on Anna and on a loosely knit group of women respectively, the narrative structures themselves challenge this concept of center. The female protagonists' seizure of the definition of the feminine from the tight grasp of the patriarchy is a violent and necessary action—a violence that is played out through and by the texts. In each case, the individual's need for identity is underscored, be it through the destructive acts of Anna which, through their very destructiveness, result in a constructive force or through the oppressive acts of a capitalist system ultimately leading to feminine self-assertion in the face of systemic anonymity and male impotency.

*Anna (jeg) Anna* tells the story of a woman whose identity has fractured under the oppressive stress of life as the wife of the Danish ambassador to Pakistan. At once terrified and fascinated by an over-

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Modern Languages Association annual meeting in San Francisco, 1991. I would like to thank Patricia Conroy for organizing that session and Karen Andersen for her helpful comments on later drafts of this paper. I would also like to thank Dr. Frank Tangherlini of the Department of Physics, College of the Holy Cross for his helpful discussions of theoretical physics.

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whelming desire to kill her daughter Minna, Anna finds herself on an airplane headed toward Denmark where she can be "cured." However, in a move away from the *pen* and *formuſtig* society which holds her imprisoned, Anna decides to change the trip's itinerary. She convinces the extradited drug smuggler, Jørgen Schwer, to follow her out of the airport in Rome, and so begins a slightly manic road trip back to Copenhagen. But now the trip is not dictated by the rules of Danish society; rather it becomes a journey of self-discovery (or discovery of self) for Anna. The unlikely duo is doggedly pursued by a relentless police inspector and, eventually, most of Interpol. Jørgen is killed in their daring attempt to cross over into Denmark, but Anna manages to sneak across the border in the ensuing confusion. The end is not an end at all: Anna abandons thoughts of suicide and turns back toward Nørrebro and her proletarian roots.

*Baby* never affords its characters the opportunity to leave their working class milieu. Instead, the novel focuses on the interconnected lives of six women and six men. Thorup abandons the concept of linear plot in her novel and instead focuses on the relational aspects which govern or, rather, fail to govern her characters' (non)action. In *Baby*, the interdependence of the characters is foregrounded to an extreme degree. Cadett is married to Marc who borrows money from Eddy, a slum lord *cum* loan shark *cum* pornography distributor, who repeatedly attempts to win back Leni and, when he does, beats her savagely, and who employs two gay body guards, Ric and Ivan, who run off with Susi, who is in love with David, the rebellious son of a wealthy industrialist, who lives part-time with Karla, an impoverished factory worker, whose child dies because of the poor heating in an apartment she rents from Eddy, who is disgusted by the attack on a bureaucrat by Sonja, who meets Karla at the bathhouse near *Trianglen* on *Østerbro*, and Nova, a young heroine addict, who meets Marc at a bar while listening to Jolly Daisy, a transvestite, sing Lou Reed covers. The plot is circular and open-ended—just as the end of *Anna (jeg) Anna* is simply a beginning, the end of *Baby* is also a beginning. In fact, one cannot help but question whether *Baby* repeats itself indefinitely. In both cases, the concept of closure is eschewed, and the reader's desire for an end is deferred back to the beginning. But through all of the developments in the novels, a glimmer of hope shines faintly, since women have learned to define the feminine apart from the male-centered definition which has imprisoned them.

## I. POSTMODERNISM, THE FEMININE, AND DANISH LITERATURE

The late 1960s was a period of social upheaval in most of the western world. Student uprisings in France triggered similar events in Denmark. Amid the social confusion and breakdown of previously unquestioned institutions, various literary movements took root, among them postmodernism. A hallmark of postmodern writing is the conscious incorporation of past traditions into new discursive modes at the same time that these exact same traditions are challenged. As noted by Hutcheon: "Postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs then subverts, the very concepts it challenges" (3).<sup>2</sup> Julia Kristeva suggests that post-modernism is "writing-as-experience-of-limits," (137) these limits being in part those of language, aesthetic production, and identity. Hans Jørgen Nielsen echoes these sentiments when, writing about the unannounced arrival of postmodernism in Denmark in the late 1960s, he notes that this new interpretive framework is based on, "grænseoverskridelse, eller bedre: grænseopløsning på alle leder og kanter" (border crossing, or better: border dissolution in every direction (*Gruppenbillede* 133)).<sup>3</sup> Postmodernism encompasses both new modes of production based on this contesting of borders, as well as a theoretical stance marked by a willingness to engage all past theoretical discourses.<sup>4</sup> The postmodern therefore reflects not a single

<sup>2</sup> The word "postmodernism" itself is contested, and no two people seem to define it in a like manner. For contrasting definitions of the postmodern see, Jameson, Huyssen, Lyotard, Hutcheon, and Kristeva. Norris's collection of essays on postmodernism and the clash of theoretical stances associated with the postmodern provides an alternate reading of the postmodern and theory engaging the postmodern.

<sup>3</sup> The concept of border crossing referred to by Nielsen takes on an almost parodic quality in Anna's repeated illegal crossing of physical national borders.

<sup>4</sup> In Denmark, the debate concerning postmodern has been long and furious, being fought out in both scholarly journals and the daily press. Nielsen suggests that postmodernism takes root in Denmark with the first issue of the journal *m'* in 1967. Kyndrup's collection of essays in 1986 on postmodernism in Denmark offers an interesting summary of many of his arguments. The problematics of postmodernism have been engaged perhaps most successfully in the journal *Kritik* two issues of which have been devoted solely to the debate (see *Kritik* 70 [1985] and 72 [1985]). Nielsen provides the clearest formulation of postmodernism in Denmark in his series of essays from 1985 and 1986, although Tania Ørum's 1987 article also provides a positive framework from which to engage the postmodern. Others, such as Friis, Juhl, Wivel, and Dehs are more likely to view the postmodern as a somewhat valueless and perhaps meaningless endeavor.

voice, but rather a polyvalence of expressions and ideas (Nielsen *Gruppenbillede* 137). In this sense, the postmodern engages, "randomness, pluralism, heterogeneity, multiplicity, dispersion and indeterminacy rather than univocity, totality, wholeness, hierarchy and polarity" (Sherzer *Representation* 3).

Along with this type of questioning and exploration comes a questioning of authority and the representatives and representations of authority—institutions, modes of production, and modes of expression. Reading *Anna (jeg) Anna* and *Baby* as postmodern novels reveals the subversions which violently challenge the male construct of the feminine, a construct supported by a long tradition of literary paternity. These subversions, in turn, free women from the prison in which they have been inscribed allowing them to re-write themselves according to their own selves.<sup>5</sup> In both cases, the works' incorporation of the very things that they challenge—capitalism, patriarchy, the tradition of writing—into the texts themselves allows the subversion to become all the more effective.

The women in *Anna (jeg) Anna* and *Baby* are able to seize control of the definition of the feminine and, thereby, work toward their own emancipation. In *Anna (jeg) Anna*, Anna abandons the carefully planned route which will bring her back to Copenhagen and the predictable care of a psychoanalyst, a person trained in the male-centered Freudian tradition whose goal is to restore her to her externally defined and male-centered position as Tom's wife. Instead of returning along this prearranged route, Anna chooses to make her way to Denmark on land and according to her own schedule. The women in *Baby* similarly resist the constant attempts by men to force them into their definitions of what and who they, the women, should be. Through resistance to the male definition of both female identity and the feminine, the centers move to the margins, thereby destroying not only the paternalistic concept of closure, but also the concept of center. This violent repositioning of center and the rejection of traditional technique within the framework of the novel genre found in both works are not ends unto themselves. Rather, both works also explore the female's quest for the construction of identity—a redefinition of the feminine on its own terms.

<sup>5</sup> Dina Sherzer writes, "Feminism is an essential part of postmodernism. For ... one of the traits of postmodernism is the decanonization of all master codes, all conventions, institutions, authorities" (*Postmodernism* 156).

*Anna (jeg) Anna* and *Baby* are products of the societal upheaval in Denmark during the late 1960s. Reacting to the oppressive force of the massive, paternalistic social capitalism, the authors rejected the conventions governing literary production but did so by at once exploiting and subverting that same tradition. The forces which led to the production of these works and the entire discontent of the period constitute the type of rupture Derrida had in mind when he wrote that, "L'événement de rupture, la disruption ... se serait peut-être produite au moment où la structuralité de la structure a dû commencer à être pensée.... Dès lors on a dû sans doute commencer à penser qu'il n'y avait pas de centre ..." (411) [The event I called a rupture ... the disruption ... presumably would have come about when the structurality of structure had to begin to be thought.... Henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center ...] (280). When the center is questioned, structure is threatened. This decentering of society is reflected in both works. While it may be tempting to speak of the ex-centric, marginal qualities of the characters of each work, it must be kept in mind that in a work where the center is constantly being redefined, everything is ex-centric. Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle may be applicable to this concept of center: the momentum and position of a quantum-mechanical particle cannot be simultaneously determined precisely (Heisenberg 172-98). Or in other words by extension, if at any moment the location of the center is known, it is impossible to know if or where it is moving. Conversely, if it is known that the center is being repositioned, it is not possible to know where that center is. *Anna (jeg) Anna* and *Baby* present the two sides of this insight. The center of *Anna (jeg) Anna* is fixed on Anna, but where it is moving is hard to tell. The center of *Baby* is in constant motion, but what that center is indeterminable.

The tradition of writing in the western world has for centuries posited women on the fringes of fiction, functioning as marginal figures at best and more often than not as one-dimensional add-ons. As Gilbert and Gubar observe, "In patriarchal Western culture, the text's author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis. More, his pen's power, like his penis' power, is not just the ability to generate life but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim" (6). In Danish fiction from the 1960s onward, one often finds a resistance to the marginalizing inscription of women into texts through a constructive challenge of the

concepts of center and closure. This postmodern stance questions both the posterity claimed by the male author and the entire project of patriarchal production, not by deliberately breaking with the past (as in modernism) but in deliberately incorporating the discourse of the past into the text in a playful manner. Here, play "is understood in the sense of altering and experimenting with modes of representation, language, cultural reference, reminiscences, allusions, quotes and typography. It involves invention, unexpected and incongruous juxtapositions, jugglings, permutations and reframings. It results in constant disruptions and its modes are both serious and ludic" (Sherzer *Representation* 5).

The *Bildungsroman*, with its sense of individual development according to the rules of nascent capitalism, is the model for play in both *Anna (jeg) Anna* and *Baby*. Unlike the strong male developmental hero of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, Riffbjerg posits a self-destructive woman as his protagonist, while Thorup presents a group of women consistently deprived of an opportunity for *Bildung*. In both cases, the previously male-centered *Bildungsroman* has been playfully reincorporated into a new, yet reminiscent, mode. Hutcheon notes, "In addition to being borderline inquiries, most of these postmodernist contradictory texts are also specifically parodic in their intertextual relations to the traditions and conventions of the genres involved" (11). The traditional *Bildungsroman* focuses on a quest for edification and individual development of the usually male protagonist into a man well-suited to the discursive modes of the patriarchy. Elsewhere, I have written how Riffbjerg enacts an inverse *Bildung* in *Anna (jeg) Anna* (Tangherlini). A similar process obtains for *Baby* as well. However, rather than a linear, albeit downward, progression, as in *Anna (jeg) Anna*, *Baby* relies on a circular progression marked by violence for its questioning of the structure of the *Bildungsroman*. The works can therefore be seen as placing the male inscription of the female in the text as woman-on-the-margins under erasure.<sup>6</sup> This act negates the hegemony of the male-female relationship and simultaneously resists the establishment of an inverse relationship, since the male-defined feminine is always already present. While the patriarchal tradition is one of opposition, oppression, and closure, the postmodern "tradition," through its acts of subversion, becomes one of difference, emancipation, and openness.

<sup>6</sup> Derrida's deconstructionist project and the importance of the concept of erasure are outlined in *De la grammatologie* and *L'écriture et la différence*.

It is difficult to overlook the fact that *Anna (jeg) Anna* is written by a man, while *Baby* is written by a woman. Rifbjerg, thus, is a man writing a woman into a text, a project similar to that of the traditional male author. But Rifbjerg is painfully aware of this process and alludes to the objectification of women that often results from such an inscriptive endeavor. Rifbjerg's ironic self-awareness of this role constitutes a postmodern stance which allows him to open the project to a refiguration of that position, a refiguration which ultimately leads to Anna's emancipation from the male-dominated prison of her relationships and the text itself. Rifbjerg undertakes the project of men writing women, particularly through the close allegiance between his work and J.P. Jacobsen's *Fru Marie Grubbe*, but immediately undermines that very same project. Just as Anna deprives Schwer of his pistol in a later scene, "[han] slipper krampagtigt pistolen" (95) [he convulsively releases the pistol]—and thereby resists his attempt to define her journey, Rifbjerg resists assuming the traditional role of the male author who deliberately inscribes women into the violent prison of the text. Subsequently, Anna authors her own story and self. She ultimately rejects the use of the pistol (the male pen) to author her life through suicide:

*Revolveren smager koldt og lidt fedtet, da jeg tager den i munden. Det er finstodende at holde mellem læberne, men unaturligt ikke at lukke munden, fordi løbet trods alt er så tyndt.... Da våbnet har klikket to gange, forstår jeg at Jørgen Schwer heller ikke kan tælle, jeg fjerner det kvalmende punkt fra min bløde gane og revolveren forsvinder i havne vandet med en svag rulling efter plasket. (250)*

[The revolver tastes cold and a little greasy, when I put it in my mouth. It is repulsive to hold between my lips, but unnatural not to close my mouth, because the barrel is so thin after all.... When the weapon has clicked twice, I understand that Jørgen Schwer can't count either, I remove the sickening point from my soft palate and the revolver disappears in the harbor water with a slight rolling after the splash.]

Here Anna, seemingly complicit in this last attempt to kill her into the text, drops the empty pistol and, unlike so many of her literary predecessors, does not commit suicide as her final act. Thus, Rifbjerg's writing, in its challenge to the traditional role of the male author, can be seen as a highly conscious act of a man writing a woman writing herself. For her part, Anna seems to escape Rifbjerg's authoritative grasp at the end, refusing the attempt to contain her within the text. Instead, she

casually walks away from Rifbjerg, suicide, and the monument to Andersen's mermaid.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, part of Thorup's project is writing women, but because of the tradition of the patriarchal inscription of women into the prison of the text, she is forced to write the effect of men on women into her work as well. Interestingly, the character Leni supports herself by translating pornography, the writing of women for men. By the end of the novel, Leni adamantly rejects this endeavor: "Jeg har oversat pornobøger, det er noget der gir godt men jeg blev træt af det, jeg kunne ikke holde det ud til sidst, det er destruktivt og trivielt" (233) [I have translated porno books, it's something that pays well, but I got tired of it, I couldn't stand it by the end, it's destructive and trivial]. Although Thorup's women are constantly treated as commodities with an unrelenting focus on sex-for-money, they ultimately reject alliances with men which force them into these positions: Cadett separates from Marc, Susi lives with Ric and Ivan, Karla refuses David's money, and Leni clearly and defiantly breaks with Eddy. Ultimately, Thorup's writing of women reflects Gilbert and Gubar's observation that "women writers ... have been especially concerned with assaulting and revising, deconstructing and reconstructing these images of women inherited from male literature" (76). Thus in both works one finds a consistent rejection by the female characters of the attempts by men—both in and out of the texts—to author their lives.

## II. ANNA(JEG) ANNA

The focus of *Anna (jeg) Anna* is Anna's quest for a reconciliation of the fragmented parts of her identity, Anna and *jeg*.<sup>8</sup> Due to the confines of a male-dominated society, Anna's personality has split into two distinct parts—the public, male-defined "Anna" and the private, rebellious "*jeg*." It is certainly tempting to view the split as that between the ego (*jeg*'et in Danish) and the id. Similarly, one could read this work along Lacanian

<sup>7</sup> See footnote 11.

<sup>8</sup> In an article from 1979, Merete Jørgensen and Lars Petersen read the novel as an exploration of neuroses that do not result in any type of edification (97). Here, however, the edification which they refer to is one based on the patriarchy. Jørgensen and Petersen accept the evaluation of Anna as psychologically ill and do not see the illness as a representation of the male-inscription.

lines, with a differentiation between the subjective and the objective.<sup>9</sup> According to Lacan's theory of language acquisition, a person becomes aware of subjectivity upon entering the "symbolic order," an order based on the "law of the father." This move into the symbolic order results in a split in which the subject is at once constituted in itself and alienated from itself thereby creating the unconscious. Anna and *jeg* represent the two sides of the subject: Anna constituted by the desire to regain the father, manifest in her marriage to Tom and *jeg* constituted by the desire of the self to regain itself. However, when *jeg* ultimately breaks from her unconscious, parenthetical prison and refuses with Anna the order based on the absence of the father, the patriarchal order is abandoned, and a new order, based on the presence of the self, emerges in the second Anna.<sup>10</sup>

A secondary split of the subject is evident in Anna's rejection of Minna. Her desire to kill Minna, to erase her own trace, forces Anna into the position of absence that Lacan theorizes for the father. The focus of the story then becomes the absent mother, an absence that one can only assume Minna experiences. But since Minna can also be read metaphorically as part of Anna—a mini-Anna, a reading which Ribbjerg overtly encourages (106, 250)—Anna's quest takes on a new significance. Anna, in this sense, absents herself from the male-defined Anna-Minna, in an attempt to regain that absent part of herself. At the beginning of the novel, Minna is a representation of the ultimate expression of male definition of the feminine. As Tom and Anna's child, Minna can be read as the result of another usurpation of the feminine space by the patriarchy. Given the implicit psychoanalytic aspect of much of the novel, one may be tempted to interpret the relationship of Anna and Minna as an inverse Elektra complex where, rather than Minna desiring to kill her mother to gain her father, the mother desires to kill her daughter to rid herself of the father: "For at det aldrig skal komme til at ligne dig [Tom], eller for at det aldrig skal komme til at

<sup>9</sup> Lacan's article on the mirror stage outlines the concept of the law of the father. Lemaire's excellent work on Lacan's writings provides a clear and succinct overview of his theories concerning the development of the self and the acquisition of language, as well as the privilege of the absence of the Father.

<sup>10</sup> Niels Bohr's theory of complementarity—the view that certain phenomena in nature, such as the electron, which is both wave and particle, necessarily need to be described complementarily but not oppositionally—applies in this sense to the description of the new Anna as well (Bohr *Atomteori*).

ligne andre end dig" (11) [So that it will never come to resemble you (Tom), or so that it will never come to resemble anyone other than you]. The goal is to prevent any alliance with the father, particularly one as all encompassing as that of a mini-Anna with her father/husband. Not until the end of the novel and the completion of Anna's attempts to regain the defining features of her own life, is *jeg* able to feel love for her child on her own terms, "Det bringer Minna tilbage igen. Jeg siger navnet for mig: Minna, Minna, Minna. Min lille Minna, min lille mini-Anna" (250) [It brings Minna back again. I say the name to myself: Minna, Minna, Minna, my little mini-Anna]. The person that Anna wanted to erase has been regained in the rippling, reflective surface of Copenhagen's harbor. The fractured individual looks down into the sea, somewhat like H.C. Andersen's fractured mermaid, and is able to regain an expression of her past and reconcile it with herself.<sup>11</sup> The crasure is not complete, and in her reflection, Anna is able to recognize the trace of her daughter. Thus, when she finally regains Minna—an absent Minna in fact—it is a reincorporation not based on the male-centered hierarchy hypothesized by Lacan, but rather on the absence of the mother, herself. By reconciling Anna (read Minna) with the *jeg*, Anna is able to define her identity and thus the feminine in terms of herself.

At the beginning of the novel, Anna is always described in terms of her husband, social position and clothing, as evidenced by numerous passages:

*Ægteskabet med Tom ... har nok fjernet hende fra det oprindelige miljø.... Fra samlivets begyndelse har Anna følt sig sideordnet med sin mand, men har måske på grund af omstændighederne måttet dempe sin impulsivitet noget. År for år er hun blevet smukkere, de repræsentative forpligtelser og en del penge, som pludselig tilfaldt Tom, har skærpet hendes sans for påklædning, frisurer, make-up. (41)*

[The marriage with Tom ... has removed her from her original milieu.... From the beginning of their life together, Anna has felt herself co-ordinate with her husband, but has maybe, because of the circum-

<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that this scene takes place at Langelinie, not far from the statue of the little mermaid, thus making the connection between this scene and Andersen's story far less tenuous than it may first appear. This link to Andersen's tale, "Den lille havfrue," also acts as a bridge to Thorup's *Baby* and, in particular, Karla, the only mother in that novel. Karen Sanders offers a detailed analysis of Andersen's use of the gaze and reflection in "Psychen," an analysis which also carries over to "Den lille havfrue."

stances, had to dampen her impulsiveness. Year by year, she has become prettier, the obligations to entertain and a sum of money, which suddenly Tom received, have sharpened her sense for clothes, hair-styles, make-up.]

Quite clearly, the alliance with Tom results in the invention of a person not defined by herself, but rather defined by and through her husband, his position, and his wealth. This Anna is the first Anna of the title. Anna gives up her studies because of her husband, breaks with her past because of her husband, leaves her country because of her husband, and becomes more beautiful because of her husband. Beautiful, that is, in the eyes of men. When Anna moves away from the male-dominated space of her earlier existence, she moves into a space where she dominates, defining males in terms of herself. Simultaneously, Anna gains control of the discursive space of the definition of the self and by extension the feminine, a space normally denied women in the traditional novel. The clearest representation of this victory is the quite literal escape of *jeg* from her parenthetical prison. The first manifestation of *jeg*, in the title itself, enacts an imprisonment from which she has already escaped by the very first line of the novel: "Igen vågnede jeg for tidligt og horte min rungende navn, Anna" (5) [Again, I woke too early and heard my name ringing, Anna]. But here, the first Anna is still free as well, and the struggle for the definition of the self becomes foregrounded. Rifbjerg presents the reader with Tom's Anna—the traditional patriarchal, male-centered definition of the woman's self, on the one hand, and *jeg*, the self-centered, yet self-destructive definition of the woman's self on the other hand.

Soon thereafter, Tom's Anna finds herself in the parenthetical prison, "Han rommede sig og steg op på talerstolen ved siden af den blå hængesofa, så ud over forsamlingen (Anna) og meddelte venligt, at hun hellere måtte tage hjem med den næste maskine" (17) [He cleared his throat and got up on the speaker's platform next to the blue hammock sofa, looked out over the assembly (Anna) and announced in a friendly manner, that she had better go home on the next plane]. Here the parenthetical imprisonment of the male-defined Anna underscores Tom's ability to dictate her actions. It is not until somewhat later, when *jeg* begins to assert her agency through tentative attempts to contact her future co-conspirator, Jørgen Schwer, that the parenthetical imprisonment of Anna and the liberation of *jeg* becomes graphically clear: "Den lille bakke forsvinder og jeg (Anna) kan ikke se den" (32) [The little tray

disappears and I (Anna) can not see it]. Clearly, the hegemonic relationship of the Anna (*jeg*) from the title has been reversed. The rest of the work follows the struggle of the fractured self in her attempts to reconcile the male-defined Anna with the rebellious *jeg* into a self-defined Anna, a process confirmed at the very end of the novel by the graphic positioning of Anna, rather than *jeg*, within parentheses: "Jeg (Anna) fryser ikke" (250) [I (Anna) am not cold].

Although Anna's road trip is initially instigated by Tom and his desire to have his Anna "cured," the unexpected change in itinerary forces a redefinition of the journey. Anna is no longer on her way back to Denmark to undergo psychoanalysis to discover the reasons for her rejection of the role of mother manifest in her violent desire to kill her daughter. Rather, she has taken control of her own destiny and decides for herself the pace and direction of the travels. As part of the break with the male-defined parameters of her life, she sheds one man after another. Her relationships to men are no longer centered on the men's wishes, as evidenced by the new relationships with Tom, her in-law Morten, and Christensen the police inspector. Instead, they center on her, as evidenced by her forceful appropriation of the outlaw Schwer. In her relationship with Schwer, she asserts both her individuality and her authority. Simultaneously, the men try repeatedly to bring her back into their control. Perhaps one of the oddest scenes of such attempts to seize Anna and return her to her role as object, comes in the fantastically improbable encounter with Roberto:

*Jeg lægger mig knælende på sengen. Mit ansigt er vendt mod døren, som går op i det samme. Roberto står i den, og jeg mærker en ilning over venstre side af brystet og mit køn krymper. I et forvaklet mytologisk billede står manden i døren med en hvid, hoven fugl på hver skulder. Han træder to skridt frem og fuglene, hvis klæber griber fat i en lederepaulet, på noget der minder om en romersk gladiatorordrags duver svagt frem og tilbage, mens øjnene blinker ... jeg kaster mig i sengen og tumler ned på gulvet, vil løbe, løbe ... Men før jeg når op på benene ... ser jeg Roberto snurre rundt i et desperat drej ... og Jørgen kommer til syne i døren med revolveren i hånden. (133)*

[I lay kneeling on the bed. My face is turned towards the door, which opens at that moment. Roberto is standing in it, and I feel a shivering over the left side of my chest and my sex shrinks. In a warped mythological picture the man in the door is standing with a white tamed bird on each shoulder. He takes two steps forward and the birds, whose talons hold tight to a leather epaulet on something reminiscent of a

Roman gladiator outfit, pitch slightly back and forth, while their eyes blink ... I toss myself onto the bed and tumble down onto the floor, want to run, run ... But before I can get to my feet ... I see Roberto twist around in a desperate turn ... and Jørgen appears in the door with the revolver in his hand.]

Reflecting the incongruous juxtapositions characteristic of the postmodern, Anna finds herself offered sacrificially to the carnal pleasure of the carnival director. Unexpectedly, Schwer bursts onto the scene, pistol waving, and prevents the rape of Anna. Although Anna had previously deprived Schwer of the gun, she has allowed him to take possession of it again, and therefore she is a co-author in the rewriting of this scene. The gun is no longer used to define the feminine sexually, but rather to prevent the attack. Thus, a powerful weapon of the patriarchy has been turned against itself, just as is the concept of *Bildung*.

Following their escape from the carnival, the two unlikely travelers head north to neutral Switzerland trailed by a small army of Interpol agents. It is in this mountain hideout, the home of an elderly Swiss couple, that Anna develops a stronger sense of self. By shedding all of her former relationships with men and by resisting attempts by men to dominate her sexually, she has moved into a position from which she can begin reconstituting herself. Thus, the relationship with Schwer becomes akin to one with a brother—a sexually non-threatening and seemingly egalitarian relationship. Anna then accepts Schwer as a lover, but on her own terms: “Han kommer ind til mig om aftenen, når de to bedsteforældre har lagt sig. Han træder ind og står et øjeblik inden for døren, som om han var min valet, der først venter på madames ja for han lover at træde nærmere” (195) [He comes in to me at night, after the grandparents have gone to bed. He steps in and stands a moment just inside the door, as if he were my valet, who waits first for madam’s yes before he dares tread closer]. The rest of the journey becomes a quest to recapture relationships, but relationships based on herself and not on others. Her hesitations and occasional misgivings which mark the first part of the trip vanish.

A great deal of the definition of feminine in *Anna (jeg) Anna* is based on the emotion of motherly love. The most disturbing aspect of Anna’s desire to kill Minna is the apparent rejection of this emotion considered by the dominant order as central to the western concept of mother. However, as Lise Busk-Jensen points out in her essay “Moderkaerlighed,” this emotion can be defined from two opposing standpoints (112–26).

Tove Ditlevsen’s volume, *Barndom*, the first in her autobiographical novel *Erindringer*, illustrates the divergence of the two views. Remembering a scene of daily life from her childhood, Ditlevsen describes a picture hanging on the wall in her childhood apartment (6). The picture is a lithograph copy of Adolph Dorph’s early twentieth-century painting of a wife waiting by the window for her husband to return home, her child sleeping in a crib by her side, entitled *Kvinde venter sin mand hjem fra søen* [Woman Waits for her Husband to Return from the Sea]. Ditlevsen also remembers the actual chaos of life in the apartment—her mother has errands to run, chores to finish, and she, the child, is unhappy and crying (6–9). Unlike the painting, her father’s absence is not the focus of apartment life. Ditlevsen notes “... min mor og jeg behøvede ikke mænd eller drenge i vores verden” (9) [my mother and I had no use for men or boys in our world]. The only calm spot in the entire apartment is quite possibly the fantastically impossible picture on the wall. In an amusing refiguration of Lacan’s absent father, Ribbjerg invokes an absent mother. Instead of focusing on the absent father as the source of language and the self, he presents Anna’s quest to regain a language and a self, not based on the father (i.e. Tom and the authority of Denmark), but rather on the self, the absent mother.

In *Anna (jeg) Anna*, *jeg* lashes out against the male definition of motherly love. By wanting to kill Minna, Anna expresses her desire to kill Tom’s definition of how she should relate to her daughter. Not until she can reconcile herself with Anna, by asserting her identity and individuality, can she express a self-defined motherly love. Because Tom defines the relation between mother and daughter, as in Dorph’s painting, and because Anna wants to eliminate Tom’s influence in her self definition, Anna cannot help but want to kill Minna. Once Anna has eliminated Tom and male definition of her identity, she is able to reaccept Minna. The final acceptance of Minna is a new situation not based on a father/husband centered lifestyle, but one in which the relationship is defined according to a non-male defined feminine—a reconciliation of *jeg* and Anna.

Ribbjerg’s *Anna (jeg) Anna* presents one view of the break with the male-centered writing tradition. While the parenthetical imprisonment of *jeg* invokes the patriarchy’s definition of the feminine and enacts the tradition of men inscribing women into prisons, Anna’s escape from her husband and her rejection of a male-centered language constitute a significant opening. *Jeg* successfully escapes her prison and through a



violent, yet necessary relocation of the center, with its accordant questioning of subjectivity, is able to (re)fuse the two parts of her fractured self into a complete, and self-defined self.

### III. BABY

A repositioning of center, or rather a removal of center, also occurs in *Baby*. In her analysis of the structure of Thorup's later works, Charlotte Gray points out that "causitive and chronological narrative has been cut up into separate, open-ended sections, each of which is added to but not continuing the preceding section" (214). This observation obtains for *Baby* as well. In the same way that Thorup fragments the narrative into discontinuous segments, relationships between people within the narrative also appear arbitrary, disconnected, and coincidental. Throughout the book, the characters talk at and past each other, rather than with each other, and the frustration inherent in an inability to communicate often ends in shocking violence:

"Er du ked af det," sagde hun ... "Nej, jeg tror det er godt for dig at være fri for mig ... Du er ufølsom," råbte Cadett og hun kastede et askbæger efter ham og det ramte væggen uden at gå i stykker ... "Jeg hader vold" Marc lukkede vinduet ... "Du elsker mig ikke," klagede Cadett. "Jeg vil ikke finde mig i fysiske overgreb," sagde han formelt ... "Du er ikke til at komme i kontakt med. (142)

("Are you sad about it," she said ... "No, I think it's good for you to be free of me ... You have no feelings," yelled Cadett and she threw an ashtray at him and it hit the wall without breaking ... "I hate violence" Marc closed the window ... "You don't love me," complained Cadett. "I will not be a party to physical encroachment," he said formally ... "I can't reach you.")

In each relationship described in the novel, edification is abandoned and destructive tendencies abound. However, the relationships do not falter on their own accord. They are pushed to the brink of destruction by an oppressive, male-dominated discursive system that is at once anonymous, all pervasive and ever-present.

*Baby* tells no single story, but rather links a series of stories of tangentially related individuals into a portrait of institutional oppression and male attempts to define the feminine through sexual aggression. Gray suggests that Thorup's novels are all "collectively oriented under-

scoring social interaction and interdependence and de-emphasizing the notion of an autonomous development and sense of self" (215), a characterization applicable also to *Baby*. Neither the beginning nor the end of the novel offers a starting point or an ending point. Furthermore, its circular construction, a construction that challenges the concept of the novel itself and undermines the concept of personal development, an idea essential to the *Bildungsroman*, constantly defers any sense of resolution. None of the characters has a goal either consciously or unconsciously. Thus, when Sonja and Nova leave on their road trip, it is without the same sense of direction that Anna has when she leaves the airport in Rome:

"Hvor skal vi hen," sagde Sonja, og Nova syntes hun havde en køn profil. "Det er lige meget, vi skal i hvert fald ikke sidde her ret meget længere," sagde Nova ... "Der er mange skønne steder," sagde Nova ... "Vi køber billetter lige så langt vi kan komme for dine penge," sagde Nova. (Thorup 1973: 93-4)

("Where should we go," said Sonja and Nova thought she had a pretty profile. "It doesn't matter, we at least aren't going to sit here much longer," said Nova ... "There are a lot of beautiful places," said Nova ... "We'll buy tickets for as far as we can get on your money," said Nova.)

Just as the narrative turns to Jolly Daisy's story, the one individual who seems to have found some form of personal development through a complete break with the male-dominated discourse, "... og J. Daisy begyndte at fortælle om sine mange oplevelser" (243) [... and J. Daisy began to tell about her many experiences] the novel ends.

Interpersonal relationships constitute the main focus of Thorup's *Baby*. Interestingly, those relationships which contradict the male-centered heterosexual order have the greatest range of possibility. Just as Thorup abandons the patriarchal writing convention of center, she also abandons the concept of hegemonic male-centered relationships. But she also refuses to posit a single solution to the problem of interpersonal relationships in a male-centered society. Rather, she presents a series of relationships and offers possible resolutions. One can catalog the relationships in the novel as follows: that between Marc and Cadett, that between Karla and David, that between Susi and Ric and Ivan, that between Leni and Eddy, and that between Sonja and Nova. Jolly Daisy exists outside and beyond relationships, a position that Thorup undeniably endorses and one which arises from Jolly Daisy's sexual ambiguity. While the men in *Baby* are condemned to eternal membership in the

oppressive system as long as they remain male, women, by virtue of the feminine, have a means for escape. These escape routes come in multiple forms: Nova's rejection of the oppression of drug addiction, a capitalist construct, by the attack on the anonymous capitalist; Leni's rejection of Eddy; Cadett's separation from Marc; Susi's refusal to support Ric and Ivan; and, perhaps most successfully, Karla's recognition of her *moderkerlighed*.

The question of relationships is further addressed in the style of the prose itself. Linguistic relationships are forged between items that otherwise are linked in only the most tangential manner:

*Efter frokost gik Eddy ind i Kongens Have og han satte sig på en bæk og foldede sin avis ud og det var d. 13. juli og dejligt vejr og de store grønne planer skinrede i solen og han lagde det ene ben over det andet og han havde en grå flannelshabit og en hvid skjorte med lysegrå striber og et mørkeblåt slips og han nød sin cigar og han sad i skyggen med ryggen til en kvindeskulptur i granit og han havde et godt helbred. (111)*

(After lunch, Eddy went in to Kongens Have and sat down on a bench and folded his newspaper out and it was the thirteenth of July and wonderful weather and the large green fields shone in the sun and he put one leg over the other and he had a gray flannel suit and a white shirt with light gray stripes and a dark blue tie on and he enjoyed his cigar and he sat in the shade with his back to a granite statue of a woman and he was healthy.)

Here, Thorup is experimenting with the borders of language. Just as relationships among the characters are arbitrary, the narrative development is arbitrary. Hierarchical relationships, in which one element is subordinated to another, give way to relationships of equality which are stylistically signaled by the frequent and insistent use of the coordinating conjunction *og*. The hegemony of grammar is abandoned. The metonymic structure of the prose and the interpersonal relationships, in which equivalence rather than subordination is privileged, comprises part of the attack on the paternalistic capitalist system and includes a hope for the emancipation of the oppressed. The subversiveness of the prose reflects the subversion of institutions which is the essence of the rebellion of the female characters.

The women, in large part, are the ones who are able to move beyond the confines of male-centered relationships and, therefore, begin to develop a self based on their own definitions. Women in *Baby* consistently resist the attempts of men to author their lives, even though they

are occasionally forced into positions of subjugation, primarily by the nagging lack of money. Cadett, despite her initial difficulties, successfully casts off the economic yoke of her husband Marc, while simultaneously maintaining an opportunity for recapturing him once she has attained self-sufficiency. In contrast, Susi, despite her non-sexual alliance with Ric and Ivan, finds herself locked into a prison of supporting them. Although her role as breadwinner, a role traditionally reserved for men, exhausts and demoralizes her, she aspires to return to school (157). The alliance with Ric and Ivan began with a drunken, late-night trip to Sweden for an abortion, which ended in a cataclysmic car wreck. This violent end of her pregnancy, though, gave birth to her ability both to break with male-centered definitions of her self and to assume the responsibility for defining herself.

While Karla is similarly forced to work in a factory to support her two young children, the work allows her the latitude to dictate the terms of David's presence in her life. Yet the responsibility of being a mother—"Jag had et barn, jeg er kneadedt till og arbejde så jeg kan sørge for ham, og jeg kan jo heller ikke leve af dig" (192) [I have a child, I have to work so I can support him, and I can't live off of you]—forces her to submit to the daily rape of a factory job: "og da kl. var 4.15 foelte hun at fabrikken havde voldtaget hende" (179) [and when it was 4:15, she felt that the factory had raped her]. Thus, the system at once oppresses the women, imprisoning them in low paying factory jobs, while economic self-sufficiency allows them to escape from the men's attempts to define them.

Eddy is the most persistent representative of the oppression and colonialization of the poor throughout the book. He, in fact, is one of the consistent factors in many of the characters' lives: the fact that Marc is deeply in debt to Eddy forces Cadett to prostitute herself to him; Leni, once sexually involved with Eddy, translates pornography for him; Karla lives in one of his apartment buildings and is thus financially linked to him as well; and Ric and Ivan were in his employ before they left with Susi. Ivan gives, perhaps, the most trenchant and incisive evaluation of Eddy: "Eddy er din fjende, kan du ikke få det ind I dit store dumme hoved," sagde Ivan ... Eddy var en gud, systemets gud ..." (67) ["Eddy is your enemy, can't you get that into to your big, dumb head," said Ivan ... Eddy was a god, the system's god ...]. While Eddy is a clear representation of oppression, a more insidious and anonymous ennui precipitated by the pervasiveness of the capitalist

system repeatedly beats the individual down removing any vestiges of self-respect and reducing the characters to acts of pathetic self-aggrandizement.

Hope in *Baby* exists solely for the women. Undoubtedly, the women are financially and sexually oppressed by the same system as are the men. Nova expresses most clearly the negative assessment of the system: "Det er klart at den der had pengene bestemmer, sådan er systemet ..." (97) [It's clear that the one who has the money decides, that's the way the system is ...]. But notably women are consistently able to reject this systematic oppression, as illustrated by Leni's break with Eddy and Cadett's with Marc. The dissolution of their relationships with men and the rejection of the system it represents lead them toward self-definitions based on terms other than those forced on them by society. Leni realizes the possibility of defining the feminine for herself in terms of her relationship with Jolly Daisy. Like Holly in Lou Reed's "Walk on the Wild Side," Jolly Daisy has decided to break with a male-centered definition of himself—he becomes a woman.<sup>12</sup> The message is clear: the only way to emancipate oneself fully from the oppression of the system is to define one's own feminine outside of economically and sexually oppressive male-based societal constructs.

Karla is perhaps the most developed of the female characters in *Baby*. Her development is due, in large part, to her role as mother. Like Anna in *Anna (jeg) Anna*, Karla gains a degree of self-realization through interaction with her children. Although her first child is killed by the uncaring, capitalist, land-owning class (Eddy, slumlords, and poor heating), she is still in possession of her own *moderhærlighed*. Her child's death hastens the realization that to have a true identity she must break with the oppressive forces of the male system. Like the portrayal in *Anna (jeg) Anna*, the view of motherly love in *Baby* is not male-idyllic. Nevertheless, it provides a grounding for Karla's identity. In a move reminiscent of Riffbjerg's fondness for allusions to other writers—perhaps most notably Kierkegaard, H.C. Andersen, J.P. Jacobsen—Thorup invokes H.C. Andersen's tales, "Den lille havfrue" and "Historien om en moder" as commentary on Karla's relationship with her children and

<sup>12</sup> Reed's original band, The Velvet Underground, often broke with the general norms associated with contemporary music, as noted by Jonathan Richman in his composition, "Velvet Underground": "Well you could look at that band and say at first sight, that certain rules of modern music wouldn't apply tonight."

with her self as a mother.<sup>13</sup> Not surprisingly, these references come in the chapter chronicling the death of her daughter Isa, in which David reads "Den lille havfrue" to the feverish Isa. Thorup characterizes the story as "den smukke fortælling fra havet" (50) [that beautiful story from the sea]. But Thorup is undoubtedly also referring to Andersen, the male author, who wrote women into a subservient position. Given the violence enacted by men on women throughout *Baby*, the irony of the reference to this story is striking. In it Andersen silences the little mermaid: "Men naar Du tager min Stemme, sagde den lille Havfrue, 'hvad beholder jeg da tilbage!'" (1:99) ["But when you take my voice, said the little mermaid, 'what will I have left!'"]. He then cuts her feet with sharp knives and swords: "og det var, som gik et tveægget Sværd igjennem hendes fine Legeme ..." (1: 100) [and it was, as if a two-edged sword went through her fine limbs]. The mermaid, a mute admirer of the prince, is a shocking corollary to the male-idyllic woman, a position into which the system tries to force the women of *Baby*.

Isa's death brings Andersen to mind once again, this time with reference to Karla: "og hun ville aldrig kom over det ligesom 'historien om en moder' [sic] ..." (63) [and she would never get over it, just like "the story of a mother"]. Here, Karla invokes the ambiguity associated both with Andersen, the male author, and the tale itself. Just like the mother in Andersen's story, Karla has sacrificed everything for her child: she has been raped by her factory job and silenced by Eddy's corporation: "Man kan jo ikke snakke med et aktieselskab" (55) [You can't talk to a corporation]. Unlike the child in Andersen story, however, Karla's child is taken away by the capitalist system, not an ultimately benevolent death. Furthermore, Karla is not afforded a choice like Andersen's mother and has no view of what might have been Isa's future unless, perhaps, Sonja and Nova are to be understood as Isa as an adult. It is through the emotion of motherly love, however, that Karla gains her strength. Thus, the positive associations of the mother's remark in Andersen's story, "Jeg er en moder," (2:163) [I am a mother] are evoked in Karla's interpolation of the story. The mother is not the subject to the desires of her husband. Even though she finds self-definition in her children, the definition does not require the presence

<sup>13</sup> In an earlier article, I have discussed an intertextual reading of *Anna (jeg) Anna* and J.P. Jacobsen's (1876) *Fru Marie Grubbe* (Tangherlini 1991). In the opening scene of an early chapter of *Anna (jeg) Anna*, Riffbjerg seems to be making playful reference to a well-known scene in Kierkegaard's "Forførerens dagbog" (Riffbjerg 51; Kierkegaard 2:292).

of a husband, a father, as Karla's position proves. The relationship between Karla, the mother, and David—her lover—is one that she defines and is not dependent on a male-idyllic view of the mother as in Dorph's painting.

### CONCLUSION

In both *Anna (jeg) Anna* and *Baby*, the female protagonists are from working class backgrounds. In this social milieu, the oppressiveness of the patriarchal system is easily seen. Even though Anna finds herself in a bourgeois setting, she does not fit in as the split between *jeg* and Anna demonstrates. Only by returning to her working class roots can she have chance of a reconciling the two parts of her personality. The novels do not suggest that only working class women can attain a personally defined identity, rather that working class women suffer most at the hand of the capitalist system. Anna's rebellion against bourgeois societal constraints leads her back to her working class roots on Nørrebro. Having stripped away the patriarchal bourgeois thinking, she here finally achieves a sense of an integrated self. The rebellious, potentially destructive acts have yielded positive end: a woman unfettered by the masculine definition of the feminine as a sexual object.

In the same manner, the women in *Baby*, in spite of the harsh light of social realism, attain a certain nobility. As a result of their emancipation from economic oppression by men, they are able to realize themselves. Among the men, only Jolly Daisy, who rejects the patriarchal norms of male behavior, is able to come to terms with his identity. While there is no hope for the men, there is some—albeit little—for the women. The path to self-defined realization in both these novels requires a period during which sexuality is rejected. Both *Anna (jeg) Anna* and *Baby* represent strong tendencies to desexualize the feminine.

As a result of the critical reappraisal of male-dominated capitalism, earlier definitions of the feminine—consistently in terms of men—were discarded. The stage was, thus, set for a deconstruction of the masculine as a means of repositioning the feminine. The depictions of men in *Anna (jeg) Anna* and *Baby* bespeak of a new interpretation of the masculine and its position relative to the feminine. The feminine is defined with an eye toward the masculine but not as a function of the masculine. In both works, men are rendered impotent and deprived of

defining power—the ultimate expression of masculinity. Furthermore, the concepts of mother and motherly love are redefined in a way that break with the masculine orientation of Dorph's absurdly idealistic painting.<sup>14</sup> Stylistically, the two works reflect the rejection of the paternalistic writing convention. Like the non-Newtonian expanding universe, where all positions are relative and imprecise, *Anna (jeg) Anna* and *Baby* deliberately lack closure. Both works are characterized by the paucity of grammatical or structural hierarchy—Anna and *jeg* constantly change place as narrator while the omnipresent narrator in *Baby* treats all relationships as equal. Reading the novels in a postmodern context reveals the playful incorporation of past modes of production in a manner that simultaneously installs and subverts. This process ultimately calls into question the genealogy of not only the text, but the entire authorial process. Through the problematization of center and rejection of male-dominated, paternalistic, or institutional definitions of the feminine, destructive forces are unleashed. However, these acts of destruction and subversion are well worth the final result.

<sup>14</sup> Idealistic solely from a male point of view.

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