JULIANE'S SPEECH: KNUT HAMSUN'S PLAY *IN THE GRIP OF LIFE* (*LIVET IVOLD*)

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Theoretical Considerations

Regine Weber-Knapp's article "'Ich glaube, ich bewege mich auf einer anderen Ebene': Überlegungen zu geschlechtspezifischem Sprachverhalten in fiktiven Dialogen" calls into question the current state of research which continues to assert the difficulty of identifying general characteristics of gender-specific language usage.[1] Weber-Knapp shows how the results of a short test with her seminar students demonstrate that gender-specific features of language usage do exist in our common knowledge and that we are able to use this knowledge to discern the gender of an anonymous speaker in fictional texts. These results also pose the question as to the appropriateness of the use of fictional or literary texts in the analysis of gender-specific features of language usage. Noting the differences between authentic and fictional texts, Weber-Knapp refers to Anne Betten's research that stresses the similarities of fictional dialogues and authentic speech patterns, concluding that literary texts can offer supplementary material for the analysis of gender-specific language usage.

Weber-Knapp's test case for her students, the text from a scene in Ingmar Bergman's film Scenes *from a Marriage* displays a number of similarities with the categories for gender-specific language usage in authentic situations developed by Claudia Schmidt. In a comparison of Schmidt's categories and the fictional text, Weber-Knapp concludes that within certain categories, including Schmidt's 'initiating and responding conversational features,' the fictional text offers a more differentiated analysis of the gender-specific nature of these conversational behaviors. Weber-Knapp indicates further that the

[1] See "'Ich glaube, ich bewege mich auf einer anderen Ebene': Überlegungen zu geschlechtsspezifischen Sprachverhalten in fiktiven Dialogen" (I think I am moving on a different level: Reflections on gender-specific language behavior in fictitious dialogues), *Dialoganalyse III.* (Bologna 1990), Tübigen, 1991.

inclusion of fictional and literary dialogues can serve a useful function in the ongoing research concerning gender-specific language usage in a historical context and as a topic of interest in both the linguistic and literary fields. The fact that the students decoded gender-specific language in spite of their acknowledgement of the performative element of gender means that fictional and authentic life dialogues are informed by the gender knowledge.[1]

My article will present an examination of interactional styles in dialogues created by Knut Hamsun in his 1910 play *In the Grip of Life* (*Livet i vold*). Hamsun equipped his protagonists with a particular speech. The point of the analysis is to investigate how Hamsun fleshed out his protagonists' speech styles, what he deemed as the most suitable and appropriate speech for women and men, and how he lets them transgress it. In fact, Hamsun uses transgression of the traditional rules of gender communication as his creative technique. Following Weber-Knapp's strategy, my analysis will focus on the following: length and frequency of speech contributions, interruptions, and initiating and responding utterances.

A literary dialog is a combination of the author's unique poetics and specific cultural circumstances -- both in terms of place and point in time. They would be specific in a Scandinavian setting, and one at the turn of the century at that. Yet the differences are not overwhelming: indeed, the prevailing similarities serve as a cultural bridge as proven by the reception of Hamsun's plays in the English speaking world. There were no major misunderstandings in the reception of Hamsun's plays.

Since we have no recorded speech from Hamsun's time, and all collected stories and/or interviews were heavily transcribed we can only make an educated guess as to what authentic speech was like. Instead, we can analyze daily and weekly press, as well as books, and turn to various pedagogical manuals to endeavor to imagine how the

[1] For the debate on whether or not women and men speak differently see, for example, Deborah Tannen's 1990 book *You Just Don't Understand*, and some of the critical responses to it by Deborah Cameron, Jenifer Coates, and Elinor Ochs. See for example Cameron's articles "Rethinking language and gender studies: feminism into the nineties," *Language & Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Sara Mills, Longman, 1995, and "The language-gender interface: challenging co-optation," *Rethinking Language and Gender Research: Theory and Practice*, 1996. See also research by scholars like Alice F. Freed who found that similarities in speech were much greater than any differences.

normative guidelines for various kinds of speech-- at church, schools, Parliament, receptions, funerals, and so forth--were put into practice.

In the introduction to Robin Lakoff and Deborah Tannen's analysis of Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage*, Robin Lakoff writes that "artificial dialog may represent an internalized model or schema for the production of conversation - a competence model that speakers have access to."[1] Lakoff continues: "[F]or each person, in any culture, there is a more or less unconscious sense of an idealized interactional human being: an idealized human being behaves in *such* a way, in *this* setting." (140) If we believe this to be true, then the conversation between Juliane and Blumenschøn could demonstrate Hamsun's ideal model -- or a deviation from it -- of how women and men, of a certain class, (should) speak.

The conversations between Juliane and Blumenschøn, the two main protagonists in the play, reveal how Hamsun creates a strong woman who secretly wants to belong, to be submissive, and who would casts away everything for the love of the leading man. Thus she agrees with the view of the proper, submissive place for a woman and participates in her own repression. Juliane and Blumschøn embody Hamsun's fears as to how modernity changed gender roles: An assertive childless woman and a spineless braggart stand as an image of degeneration, an image later replaced with that of the Negro Boy and Juliane at the end of the play. Given the lack of strong men in Juliane's surroundings, a Negro Boy, the play suggests, is her only match.

The Play

The main protagonist in *In the Grip of Life*, Juliane, a former cabaret singer, is a middle-age woman who took and takes her lovers freely. Juliane is portrayed as powerful, manipulative, still beautiful, but also as shallow, jealous and flirtatious. While her marriage is solid, her self-confidence seems to be based solely on her relationship with her present lover Alexander Blumenschøn. The play's main plot charts Juliane's gradual disintegration. While her social power in many ways remains undiminished, her increasingly rambling speech is a sign of psychological dissolution. Juliane's downfall is announced by her own words already in Act One:

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[1] See Deborah Tannen, 1996. *Gender & Discourse.* Oxford University Press, p.139

> You know my destiny? Things go downhill with women like me. You know that I used to say that it'll end up with a nigger. [She laughs] It's quite true. But I'm neither old nor ugly.[1]

A variant of the Negro utterance is repeated frequently, as a marker of her speech, her awareness of her downslide, and a signal of her erotic drive.

Considering that class affects speech, the characters' class positions are relevant. Juliane is wealthy and respected in the community. In semi-public settings with other people, be it guests, musicians, or friends, Juliane seems to be at ease speaking out, conversing in a relaxed way and contributing comments and information. This assertiveness is a feature of her past experiences and present class status.

Blumenschøn, on the other hand, is shown to be insecure and arrogant. He limps and is empty-headed. "I imitate nobody. I am myself. I think of myself. I am strong. An Egotist.“(16) Several longer passages assigned to Blumenschøn make him look ridiculous and pompous, self-centered and aloof. His verbosity does not lend him respect. On the contrary, it shows him as a superficial egotist displaying his lower social status.

Stage Instructions

First I'll point out the symbolism of first and last names: the play deliberately plays with Mrs. Gihle of now, a married and wealthy woman afraid of a public scandal and with an acute sense of propriety, and Juliane from the past, the cabaret singer with a dubious past. The communication between various protagonists in public is done with respectable addresses. Occasionally the formal address slides into an informal first names usage, indicating familiarity and intimacy between the speakers.

In difference to Hamsun's other plays, the stage instructions describe the physical appearance of the protagonists only scarcely. The stage instructions inform us of the characters' exit and entrance and so forth and the characters are developed mainly through their speech. One exception is movement markers for Juliane illustrating

[1] See *In the Grip of Life*, 1924. Authorized English version by Graham and Tristan Rawson. New York. Alfred A Knopf. P. 19.

her emotional responses: she often gets up and sits down, hides her face sighing, and throws herself in a chair or on the floor.

Dialogue Excerpt from Act One:

...
Blumenschøn: Come and help me, Juliane.
Mrs. Gihle.: Juliane?
B: Did I say Juliane? I didn't mean to. You mustn't mind if I-
Mrs. G: Oh! I don't mind.
...
B: Why did you marry that old man? You see the consequences now-boredom and unhappiness. Of course you're rich-
Mrs.G: The consequences are not what you think, Alexander. I'm not a fool. I only could marry-well.
B: You were very extravagant when you were a singer.
Mrs.G: Yes and no. But I thought of the future.
B: A girl shouldn't sell herself to make her future secure.
Mrs. G: No. But a woman must. I was over thirty. You smile? You think I mean over forty? I wasn't. But I was - well over thirty. And I didn't sell myself. I've never believed in being stupid. So I took Gihle. What do you think I ought to have done? On the stage I learned -
B: On the stage?
Mrs. G: Yes. I've sung in cabarets all over the world. I learned there that nobody gives a girl flowers for nothing. I was tired of all that. Now I buy my own flowers. …(14-15)

This dialogue between Blumenschøn and Juliane had begun earlier with a focus on old Gihle. When Juliane gradually wants to establish some closeness to Blumenschøn, he continues to speak about her husband. Blumenschøn finally makes a slip of the tongue and calls her Juliane, something he repudiates instantly. When he accuses her having married an old man, she defends herself quite rationally and pragmatically. The analysis of Act One shows that the goal of her talk is to create closeness, which is supported by the stage instructions: she takes off her coat, her shawl, and her jacket. He insists on distance, talking about business and immigration. Yet when he finally gets personal, and starts paying her compliments, she's not interested, and

he dismisses her. There is an additional tension between them expressed by the stage instructions in Act One: he locks and she unlocks the door several times.

In the conversation above, Juliane is presented as confident and reasonable, experienced and pragmatic. "I'm not a fool," she says unapologetically and defends her choices steadily.

The pattern of her desire for closeness versus his distance, peppered with his occasional outbursts of jealousy, is repeated throughout the play, emphasizing the discrepancy in their agendas. Her realization that it is all over comes in the last act only, Act Four. Juliane resigns herself to any kind of camaraderie, as she says: "But be angry with me, it's better than nothing. At least, you speak to me." (133) They are out of sync regarding their metastrategy from the beginning to the end.

Act Two introduces the contrast between young Fanny and middle-aged Juliane. Juliane soon launches one of her anxious, longer passages, which repeats her doomsday theme: "[E]very step I take is another step downwards, every step is lower than the last." She rounds off her passage by apologizing: "you must excuse my talking so incoherently-" [she sits down heavily on a seat] (62)

Act Three presents Juliane as acutely aware of the age difference between herself and Fanny, as in the following excerpt:

> Mrs. G: And she's so young-so very young.
> B: Don't speak like that, Mrs. Gihle. You're a beautiful woman yourself. You're tired tonight.
> Mrs. G: I shan't give in. You wouldn't mind if I did. But never I will. [She grasps his hand, and speaks with restrained passion.] If what the messenger brings you makes you rich and independent, you won't leave me then, will you?
> B:[trying to get away] Mrs. Gihle won't let me go, Fanny.
> Fanny: You're talking so strangely there. What's the matter? (100)

In Act Three Hamsun lets Juliane be revealed as a woman who is irresistibly drawn to the seductive atmosphere of hotels, music, and entertainment. She can't restrain herself. "It's much jollier drinking champagne away from home" she exclaims, revealing her past, and

her true essence (77). Anxious and agitated, she attempts to sing a song about her legs, lifts her skirt a bit, reels off a monologue, and finally bursts into tears (104-107). This passage shows her as a hysterical and slightly pathetic character. In the climax of Act Three, Boy brings a cobra into the room. Juliane opens the lid of the cage and tries to push Fanny's arm inside. There's a general commotion, the snake escapes, and bites Bast who later dies.

Soon into Act Four, Juliane starts a rambling monologue loosely addressed to Fanny, which opens with "[O]nce I was just as young and fresh as you are now" (122). She disintegrates further until the final, dramatic exchange between Juliane and Blumenschøn in which she throws herself on the floor in front of Alexander:

> B.: Are you sorry for me?
> Mrs. G.:Yes. For you too. No, not for you, because you're going to leave us. Alexander! [she throws herself at his feet.]
> B.: Get up! Get Up! Someone might come. Don't you hear me?
> Mrs. G.: I don't care if they do. Everyone shall know that I love you. Because soon it will be all over.
> B.: Let me get up! [he does so]
> Mrs. G.: [getting up too] No, Sit down again. I'll go. [Throwing herself into a chair.] You usedn't to forbid me to show my love for you. Is that what you're thinking now?
> B. [Sitting down] What am I to say. There's time for everything. We're not alone here now.
> Mrs. G.: But you used to let me show I cared for you when we weren't alone. You wouldn't have liked me to have been so careful then.
> B: What am I to say to that? (130-131)

It is significant that Juliane does not care about the others' opinion anymore, for the play has consistently presented her as afraid of a scandal: "I don't want to look foolish" (72); "I don't want a scandal" (111); "There would have been a dreadful scene if the revolvers hadn't been taken away." (118) The exchange above is followed by two longer monologues by Juliane, while Blumenschøn only interjects short sentences or exclamations. When Blumenschøn starts attacking her for

her behavior, Juliane meekly replies with "Did I?" "It was very wrong of me." "I should not have done it." Yet Blumenschøn escalates the attack:

> B.: You weren't embarrassed. Only concerned with what the public might think about you. But they wouldn't have dreamed of thinking anything if you hadn't been a certain Juliane, a certain beautiful Juliane! You didn't mind that. No, you were proud of it. There you stood, looking at us, reveling in your past, in your shame!
> Mrs. G.: It was very wrong of me. I should have restrained myself. I tried, but I couldn't. It was that wretched hotel. The air there, the smell on the stairs, the smoke of the cigars. But since I married I've been better than I was, Alexander. I've changed a great deal. I'm sure I didn't pull up my dress far.
> B. Far enough. .... (134)

After it is revealed that Alexander had in fact been secretly supported by Juliane, her speech becomes a variant of an appeasing guilt-taking refrain "It's all my fault.'"(146) "Don't be angry with me for that, Alexander"; "Don't be angry"; "I did not dare tell you"; "It was all my fault, everything." (147) Her meekness notwithstanding, Alexander reveals his opinion of her, namely that she is a loose woman. The conversation is over with this statement:

> B.: Mrs. Gihle, I don't think it matters what we believe about one another. The question is, what will the police believe, and the eyewitnesses?
> Mrs.G.: The police! [she sinks on to a chair.] (149)

In this final exchange between former lovers, he addresses her "Mrs. Gihle" while invoking a threatening police investigation. At the end described as tired and resigned, Juliane is defeated, her head bowed and her body slumped. That is, until Boy appears and she faces him standing up. None of the other characters' body language receives so much attention.

Length and speech contributions

In terms of the number of speech contributions, Juliane and Blumenschøn contribute to conversations more or less equally. An analysis of their turn taking shows them as more or less equal partners as well. In general, Juliane's and Blumenschøn's speech shows that, depending on the context, a certain linguistic strategy can be an instrument of subordination or control, applied by the strong or weak protagonists in a variety of ways, according to their skills and goals.

One difference however is that, as the play develops, Juliane has more and longer monologues as a function of her increasing anxiety. She is of course, the main character, which warrants the attention. Still, her monologues are increasingly incoherent, they shift subjects abruptly, and are accompanied by restless body movement. The monologues are performed in public, or at least in front of several acquaintances, as a sign that Juliane's facade of self-restraint is cracking. Yet, while Juliane dominates the stage in this way, her verbosity is a sign that she is dissolving, losing control over Alexander. Most strikingly, her long outbursts achieve nothing, except give her some temporary sympathy from other characters.

Other markers, for example, simple sentences versus dependent clauses, metaphoric usage, and vocabulary are apportioned quite equally. Juliane's wealth and her standing in the local community give her visibility and the right to speak. All in all, she is a formidable and admirable interlocutor, far from being helpless and victimized. Juliane dominates the play and is also the most developed character. In Juliane there is strength and an ability to make choices but also vulnerability and fickleness.

In her 1992 "Kvinnemonologene hos Hamsun," Amy van Marken has described the monologues by Hamsun's heroines from his novels as examples of women's language.[1] She compares the heroines' monologues with the findings of sociolinguists published during the late seventies and early eighties. Van Marken contends that unrestrained flow of words, more emotional adjectives, more oral expressions, more hesitancy and hedging, and finally monopolizing of speech characterized a number of Hamsun's women protagonists. While I agree with Van Marken to a

[1] Amy van Marken: "Kvinnemonologene hos Hamsun". In: Nils Magne Knutsen (ed): *Knut Hamsun og Norden. Ni foredrag fra Hamsun-dagene i 1992*, Hamarøy 1992.

point, I would suggest situating speech into a context in which power relations are clearly defined. In extension of Deborah Cameron's writing, I would claim that as feminists we cannot stop at describing the linguistic strategies typical of women. Instead we must ask why women find some communicative practices more relevant than others within their specific social environment. In other words we need to ask why Hamsun lets Juliane speak the way she does and how he frames her speech.

Initiating and Responding Conversational Features: Transgressing the Rules.

While several of the main protagonists introduce various topics of conversation, Juliane pushes her interests most aggressively. Instead of respecting social rules of politeness, she displays her disregard for others, for example, ignoring that Bast is in mortal danger. She transgresses the rules of polite conversation repeatedly by being too intimate, by referring to her liaisons, and to her past. But she also transgresses the rules by being assertive and by defending her choices clearly and boldly while other characters operate with insinuations and vague references to a sense of propriety. She sometimes ignores others' utterances and proceeds with her own agenda and at other times only briefly acknowledges their presence and returns to her own topic. She mixes a variety of speaking styles, from being quite assertive at the beginning of the play, to being meek and accommodating toward the end. Her speech shows her as a strategically skilled speaker yet one whose basic lifestyle choices are disastrous.

Juliane disrupts the flow of 'normal' conversation by changing topics frequently. Her pattern of changing topics suggests both restlessness, and a deliberate strategy to create involvement, to command attention and steer the course in her direction. Underneath her strategy is her nature, as dramatically revealed in Act Three. She is a born exhibitionist at the mercy of her drives.

The Negro refrain, which she utters at regular intervals, is one that leaves others speechless and is thus her own only. Another marker of her speech is her dismissive talk of other women. While feminists have always stressed solidarity among women, Juliane displays derogatory talk about women is general, and Fanny in

particular. In the final analysis, she thus tells us how she sees herself as a woman.

Examples: “You know I’m not a woman’s woman. I don’t like my own sex.” (17); “I never did care for my own sex” (77); “What fuss they’re making about you! (101); “You’re handsome; I do envy you.” (108) This last statement she makes just before she leads Fanny to the cage with the cobra snake in it. In Act Four Fanny says: “Mrs. Gihle would have to think me very dangerous to herself to want to get rid of me like that.” (119). Finally, Juliane says: “I hate all the other women, I wish they were all dead. I’m so jealous of them, I could cry out.” (132-133)

Juliane and Boy

It is significant that the communication between Juliane and the Negro Boy is non-verbal that is pre-language and pre-culture. The attraction the Negro exercises upon Juliane is dramatic. When Boy first appears on stage, Juliane rises in awe and stares at him, perhaps in sexual attraction, perhaps in fear or apprehension, or both. This silent attraction is not just a sign of difference that Hamsun invented for his two characters but an ideological statement about the two Others who belong together, a black man and a stage actress. A connection is established between blacks and theater as Juliane remembers: “It was like meeting an old acquaintance. We used to have them at the theatres. I mean, at the Variety theatres.” (85)

Just before the final scene, Fredriksen the musician reminds Juliane of her ominous words again: "‘I'm going downhill, Fredriksen,’ you said to me some years ago. ‘It'll end up with a nigger,‘ that’s what you said. It was a regular saying of yours then.“ (155) The play ends with Juliane addressing Boy with one single word, ‘welcome.’ The Negro boy is a punishment for her having transgressed several rules of accepted behavior past and present: being an actress, being sexually active, avoiding motherhood, and making her own decisions. It is Bast, the Boy’s previous owner who sends Boy to Juliane in the end, and we can interpret his final gesture as a posthumous revenge. I believe too that the ending is a signal of the playwright’s moral judgment.

Conclusion

My conclusion is that the linguistic differences Hamsun uses to differentiate the male-female speech are small. In general, he uses equality principle when he develops the speech patterns of his protagonists. Yet it is this equality which is deviant, for Hamsun has created an experienced woman with a past. A woman like Juliane was considered abnormal simply because she dared to be on stage. Juliane is a Darwinian mistake, symbolically expressed in her lack of maternal instincts, her sexual aggressiveness, and her fickle nature.

At the turn of the century it was not appropriate for a woman to be too independent and sexually adventurous, a generally accepted view that Hamsun agreed with. Hamsun assigns Juliane what has traditionally been perceived as male speech assertiveness - and even content in the way she derogates herself and other women - seemingly creating a strong female character. But inevitably this strength is self-destructive. The tragic consequences for a woman who tries to be different are illustrated through Juliane's monologues --incoherent, restless, and unrestrained. With the monologues Hamsun shows us how Juliane's true nature comes to light and, more tragically, how she disintegrates.

If we agree that at the turn of the century there was a marked division between public male and private female domains, and that public discourse was characterized as information driven and adversarial in style and the private discourse as seeking solidarity and cooperation, then Juliane is a double outcast.

In conversations with or about other women, for example with Fanny, she is Fanny's adversary and competitor. With Blumenschøn she brings private, emotional issues into the public, lobbies for intimacy, and exposes her changing nature not in private but in front of other people.

In contrast to Hamsun's novels, where the woman protagonist is shown through the eyes of the first-person male narrator, his play *In the Grip of Life* gives Juliane her own voice. What she says however is mostly identical to derogatory utterances about women by some of Hamsun's male protagonists.

Juliane, not a creative artist but merely a cabaret singer, is a strong and interesting woman protagonist, a tragic heroine deserving our sympathy. She is special, for who wants a boring heroine? Yet

stepping over the threshold of propriety unleashes dire consequences. She is a heroine who is aware of the consequences of her actions as obvious by her Negro refrain. Her language and behavior signal at regular intervals that she longs for a strong man who will keep her in check and thus in her proper place. Juliane, resembling the strong female protagonists from Hamsun's other plays, is complicit in her own repression. A woman who secretly wants to be dominated is Hamsun's ideal, imaginary woman protagonist.