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Comparing Inger Christensen and Birgitta Trotzig

The essay compares Inger Christensen's (1935-2009) poetry and poetics with the work of the Swedish writer Birgitta Trotzig (1929-2011). It tests the potential of comparison by asking what happens if we compare what might be the two most prominent women writers of Nordic post-war modernism, two writers whose paths have crossed over the years. The first half of the paper traces a shared constellation of motifs (eye/butterfly/death) within two books of poetry, Trotzig's "Anima" (1982) and Christensen's "Sommerfugledalen" (1991). The initial comparison of motifs leads to a shared poetics. It offers a trotzig'ian version of Inger Christensen's version of the condition of secrecy and fundamental parallels in their philosophy of language and the subject. But it also points to a major difference between the real as a mystic category in Trotzig and Inger Christensen's more seamless, lucid, and dreamlike style. Advancing further into a stylistic comparison the linguistic and visionary abundancy of Trotzig's "Anima"-poems reveals an overlooked quality in Christensen's: That Christensen's poems are also luxurious, albeit, typically, with moderation. The balancing of sense and sensibility appears by comparison to be a key trait in her poetry, highlighting its classical inclination. The paper demonstrates how comparison makes its subject visible by way of the other, and how comparison points out new nuances or flavors in the texts as it opens a conversation between two major women writers of Nordic modernism.

Keywords: Inger Christensen, Birgitta Trotzig, Comparison

Doing Comparison

Why compare? Comparison tends to rib its subject of its singularity, dragging it towards the recognizable, the already heard of. Comparison is also often normative, unavoidably attached to hidden taste-regimes, the text that belongs to the governing norm always wins. Plus: comparison too easily turns into a tiresome ping-pong, a pointless pointing out of similarities and differences. But then again, and in the words of Susan Stanford Friedman: “Why not compare?”¹ Having listed the cons, she lists the pros: Comparison is a basic cognitive skill. Isn’t sensemaking always some kind of comparison, translation, framing, conceptualization, theory? And doesn’t comparison also, I would add, have the ability to make different norms visible, revealing dominant tastes rather than concealing them? Furthermore, bad comparisons are static, good comparisons are dynamic, looking just as much for the incompatible as the compatible, making things collide, transform, putting them into new contexts. Good comparison makes its subject visible by way of the other.

I will be comparing Birgitta Trotzig (1929-2011) and Inger Christensen (1935-2009). I am not the first to bring the two together. They were friends. They met through the Danish sculpturer Jørgen Haugen Sørensen, who as a young man had stayed with Ulf and Birgitta Trotzig in Paris. They also met in 2013 on the motto-page of the much younger Swedish poet Ida Börjel’s poem “Ma”. Börjel connects the two by making them address related aspects of her own poetics.² The year before Lisbeth Larsson called them the two most prominent women writers of Nordic post-war modernism in an article in “The History of Nordic Women’s Literature”.³ Contrary to their male colleagues they develop a less alienated language, Larsson writes. They also met in translation. Christensen translated Trotzig’s 1985 novel “Dykungens dotter” [“The March-King’s Daughter”] into Danish, and she wrote an afterword for the German edition. They both happened to be in Paris at the time of the student uprisings in 1968.

All these encounters are, with the exception of Lisbeth Larsson’s argument, circumstantial. They point to the possibility not the necessity of comparison. So why compare the two? To test the possibilities of comparison, and to see how two related writers might bring forward traits in each other’s writings. Hence, this paper has no thesis statement. Instead, it has a method, comparison, and a question: What happens if we compare what might be the two most prominent women writers of Nordic post-war modernism, two writers whose paths have crossed in different ways over the years? The paper takes the comparison in three directions: motif, poetics and style.

¹ Friedman (2013). For further discussions see „New Literary History”, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2009 (Comparison).

² Börjel (2013).

³ Larsson (1982).

Motif

I will begin by suggesting a sixth meeting place: butterflies. More precisely, I am going to trace a constellation of motifs: eye/butterfly/death. The constellation is central to Trotzig's collection of prose poems "Anima" from 1982. Especially the eyes:

På de gamla freskerna är änglarnas vingar täckte med ögon. Människan är i verkligheten också utvärtes och invärtes täckt med ögon – hudögon, hinnögon ända längst in. Hjärtats botten är ett enda, mycket stort öga.

Livets kropp är en fjärilmänniskokropp, seende känselkropp⁴

On the old frescoes the wings of the angels are covered with eyes. Man is, for real, at the inside and on the outside, covered with eyes – skin-eyes, membrane-eyes all way in. The bottom of the heart is one single, very large eye.

The body of life is a butterfly-human-body, a seeing feeling-body

It is the all-seeing eye of providence that looks at us from the wings of the angels, the angels that in many of the frescos look like butterflies, resembling a "butterfly-human-body". Trotzig passes the holy eyes of the angels on to the humans and transforms them into one feeling eye, "a seeing feeling-body". The divine gaze on the humans is transformed into a seeing human omnipresence.

In the collection, the eyes are present in exorbitant compounds and metaphors such as "dödsögonklarhet" ["death-eye-clarity"] and "jordögon" ["earth-eyes"], rows of adjectives and adverbs such as "ett ätande allvarsamt djupt öga" ["a gluttonous gravely deep eye"], and anaphors like "(ögon krossade isspeglar, ögon knäckte isprismor, ögon insjunkna speglar mörknade hål där den korte livstiden samlats som spillvatten)" ["(eyes smashed ice-mirrors, eyes broken ice-prisms, eyes sunken mirrors darkening holes where the brief life span is collected like waste water)"].⁵ They are fragments. Detached from the face and coupled with death, body, and matter of nature. The omnipresent synesthetic and close-to-death gaze is intensified by the eyes participating in the dominant light and mirror metaphors of the collection: everything is seen in everything. As it is in the first poem of the book:

Jag ser in i det gröna, yta i oändlighet, viskande oändlighet, viskningarnas kropp, tungor, det gröna är tungor och ögon, reflexer och rörlighet, fuktighet, ljusgnistor – på vad sätt är jag skild från det, jag är inte skild från det, jag är ett öga, allt är speglingar och viskningar, ljus i en mörk spegel vandrar längre och längre in i den speglade skogen⁶

⁴ Trotzig (1982: 17). Translation: D.R.

⁵ Ibid., 24, 88, 28, 63. Translation: D.R.

⁶ Ibid., 5. Translation: D.R.

I see into the green, surface of eternity, whispering eternity, the body of the whispers, tongues, the green is tongues and eyes, reflexes and movement, humidity, sparks of light – in what way am I detached from it, I am not detached from it, I am an eye, all is mirrors and whispers, light in a dark mirror wanders further and further into the mirroring forest

It is an animated nature, nature as a mesh of matter, body, and spirit, and it is an aestheticized nature.⁷ The poem alludes to Charles Baudelaire's sonnet "Correspondances" (1857) with its synesthetic, suggestive forest of words. The depth of Trotzig's forest is, however, created by surface effects.⁸ The green is surface, tongues and eyes, reflections and movement, moisture, sparks, mirrors, and whispers. With its mirror poetics, the poem also echoes Stéphane Mallarmé's wording in "Crise de vers" (1896) on how the words of the poem "light each other up through reciprocal reflections like a virtual swooping of fire across precious stones".⁹ Again, the I of the poem morphs into "an eye" and moves from being a spectator of the greenness to being part of an omnipresent greenness.

The constellation of the motifs eye-butterfly-death crystallizes in this poem:

kryper en grön larv i ett mörkt träd. Sommarkväll. Men blekgrön isgrön himmel.
Barnet sover med en tänd lampa. Över hennes höga sköra panna kryper grå
nattfjärilar.

Sommarnattens ljus speglar sig i ligustersvärmarens rosa vingfläck, underbare
maskering, underbara lena fjärilskropp.

Det nyfödda barnet och döden ser varandra klart i ögonen. Fjärilen lever i natten,
en målning av döden.

Världens tillstånd: samtidigheten.

Allting är verkligt. Allting är lika verkligt. Fjärilen med färgögonen. Det djupgröna hjärtformade syrenbladet kluvet från basen av vatten-silver-rännan, darrande. Vingarna med de underbara ögonfläckarna står stilla över nattens daggiga blad. Inuti det stilla gröna vilar sommarnattens vitgröna djup orörligt och klart. Samtidigt föds någon. Dör någon. Torteras någon. Jorden välver sig vidare kring sig själv med sin mognande jäsande allt tyngre massa av födelse och död. Några av historiens krig pågår. En hud av död, andning, nyfödda ögon, fjärilsvingar, ökad radioaktivitet och splitterbomber täcker jorden.¹⁰

Crawls a green caterpillar in a dark tree. Summer night. But pale-green ice-green sky. The child sleeps with a lamp on. Above her high frail forehead gray moths crawl.

⁷ Mesh in the sense of Morton (2007).

⁸ Baudelaire (1968: 46).

⁹ Mallarmé (2007: 208).

¹⁰ Trotzig (1982: 19). Translation: D.R.

The light of the summer night is reflected in the red dot on the wing of the privet hawk moth, marvelous masking, marvelous lean butterfly-body.

The newborn child and death see each other straight into the eyes. The butterfly lives in the night, a painting of death.

The state of the world: synchronicity.

All is real. All is equally real. The butterfly with the colour-eyes. The deep-green, heart-shaped lilac leaf split from the base by the water-silver-rim, trembling. The wings with the marvelous eye-dots stand still above the dewy leaves of the night. Inside the still green rests the white-green abyss of the summer night matchless and serene. At the same time someone is born. Someone dies. Someone is tortured. The Earth continues to revolve around itself with its ripe, fermented mass of birth and death. Some of the wars of history take place. A skin of death, breath, newly born eyes, butterfly wings, increased radioactivity and fragmentation bombs cover the Earth.

The opening syntactic fragment signals, along with the frayed graphics of the poem, something open and provisional. The text is divided in the middle between the description of the child and the butterfly in the three first stanzas and the last large stanza that after having viewed the summer night in the deep of the lilacs ends by zooming in on the floating globe and the frail and fragmented state of the world. The butterfly is present in both halves of the poem.

The privet hawk moth (the moths are called butterflies [fjäril] in the original) has a black and pink back wing and abdomen, but no dots. Nevertheless, the poem makes the connection to the eyes, first metonymically by letting the butterfly follow immediately after the eyes, the eyes belonging to the child as well as to death, then directly pointing to the “butterfly with the colour-eyes”, the “wings with the marvelous eye-dots” and “newly born eyes, butterfly wings”. The figurative language installs the butterfly as the third party of the gaze that is exchanged between the child and death. In Christensen’s words, “Det er døden som med egne øjne / ser dig an fra sommerfuglevingen”¹¹ [“This is death that looks through its own eyes / regarding you from wings of butterflies”].¹² The butterfly is “a painting of death”. It already takes on the role of the messenger of death in the third line of the poem where “grey moths” “crawl” over the child’s forehead. Realistically, the moths must be above the child, drawn by the light of the lamp, metaphorically they move across its forehead. (The Swedish preposition “över” makes both readings possible.)

The focus on the “marvelous lean butterfly-body” turns the butterfly into a being between two worlds that mirror each other like its two wings, like life and death. The two worlds are clearly drawn up by the end of the poem, and they are

¹¹ Christensen (1991: Sonet XV, unpaginated).

¹² Christensen (2004: 17).

doubled by the two parts of the poem itself. The poem is symmetrically arranged around its own axis like a butterfly with the line “The state of the world: synchronicity” as the center, the border between the realms of life and death.¹³ The movement of the ending, first towards the Earth gliding pregnant through the universe with its dire cargo, and then the war, radioactivity and the fragmentation bombs, echoes Christensen’s “alfabet” (1981) [“alphabet”], be it the helium and the nuclear-bomb poem or these lines:

i Jorden; Jorden; Jorden i sit omløb
om solen findes; Jorden på sin rute
gennem Mælkevejen findes; Jorden på vej
med sin last af jasminer, med jaspis, jern¹⁴

into Earth; Earth; Earth in its trajectory
around the sun exists, Earth on its journey
along the Milky-Way exists, Earth on its course with
its cargo of jasmines, jasper, iron,¹⁵

Written the year after “alphabet” and nine years before “Sommerfugledalen” [“Butterfly Valley”] (1991), “Anima” spins a thread from the first to the latter. The connection from “Anima” to “Sommerfugledalen” is strengthened by a third appearance of the butterflies in an untitled poem dedicated to Marina Tsvetajeva:

Marina, orden börjar som fjärilar.
Som skum mot läpparna, silverskum. Fjärilar. Våldiga hav, solar, skum.
Som galna fjärilar. Som en vit tromb rör sig före och banar väg ut i öknen, ut i den
dansande blytätheten.
Glädje, fjärilar, silver. Svart askpegel död! Glädja!
Den vita fjärilsstormen virvlar över vågorna. Glitter! Födelse!¹⁶

Marina, words begin like butterflies.
Like foam against the lips, silver-foam. Butterflies. Vast sea, suns, foam.
Like mad butterflies. Like a white tornado moves ahead and opens the way out in
the desert, out in the dancing lead-thickness.
Joy, butterflies, silver. Black ash-mirror. Glitter! Birth!
The white butterfly storm whirls above the waves. Glitter! Birth!

The here mentioned storm of butterflies together with its pathos of creation and dominant verticality echoes the opening of “Sommerfugledalen” where the storm has become a swarm:

De stiger op, planetens sommerfugle
Som farvestøv fra jordens varme krop,

¹³ The poem produces *mise en abyme*-metaphors: The caterpillar as the not yet fully grown is repeated in the the Earth’s “fermented mass of birth and death”. The child’s head and the Earth are globes for crawling and warfare, and deep in the lilac the summer night unfolds.

¹⁴ Christensen (1981: 20).

¹⁵ Christensen (2000a: 23).

¹⁶ Trotzig (1982: 73). Translation: D.R.

Zinnober, okker, guld og fosforgule,
En sværm af kemisk grundstof løftet op.¹⁷

Up they soar, the planet's butterflies,
Pigments from the warm body of the earth,
Cinnabar, ochre, phosphor yellow, gold
A swarm of basic elements aloft.¹⁸

The connection between “Anima” and “Sommerfugledalen” depends, as noted, not solely on the butterfly. Butterflies are a commonplace in poetry accompanied by a symbolism ranging from death to rebirth and metamorphosis. It is the constellation of motifs eye/butterfly/death together with light, metaphors of creation, and a dominant ascending movement that spins the thread between the two. I purposely make use of the thread-metaphor. The comparison discovers connections, not necessarily influences. Perhaps the similarities between Trotzig and Christensen can be regarded as analogous patterns of creation, lines of imagination that fall into place in similar forms making comparison possible, or—more boldly and in Christensen’s terms—as “the ordering effect of the accidental” [“tilfældighedens ordnende virkning”].¹⁹

Poetics

The comparison on the level of motifs calls for a more general comparison, one of poetics and style. The butterfly storm in the poem to Marina Tsvetajeva is where the words emerge. They begin as a foam of butterflies against the lips, almost as butterfly words. As it is put in “Sommerfugledalen”, the poem melts “words with phenomena” [“smelter ord og fænomen”].²⁰ In “Anima”, Trotzig writes: “Världen och själen är ett. De smälter. De taler – utifrån, inifrån, från alla håll och väderstreck.” [“The world and the soul are one. They melt. They speak—from the outside, from the inside from all directions and all corners of the world.”]²¹ This corresponds to what Christensen with Novalis names “hemmelighedstilstanden” [“the state of secrecy”]. It is defined as a confluence of inner and outer states and of word and phenomenon, and of standing “midt i et univers, der slet ikke har nogen midte” [“in the middle of a universe that has no middle at all”]—what I have called omnipresence, and what in the Trotzig-quote above is called “from all directions and all corners of the world”.

The figure includes the loss of self that Inger Christensen calls “afrealisering” [“derealisation”] and describes as an undermining of the subject-object-relation

¹⁷ Christensen (1991: Sonet I, unpaginated).

¹⁸ Christensen (2004: 3).

¹⁹ See Christensen (2000b): “Tilfældighedens ordnende virkning”. Translation: D.R.

²⁰ Christensen (2004: 15); Christensen (1991: Sonet XIII, unpaginated).

²¹ Trotzig (1982: 68). Translation: D.R.

where the subject is subjected to the world around it while what appeared to be objects takes on the role of subject. The reader will remember how the I of Trotzig's meshy "green poem" above morphs into "an eye" and moves from being a spectator of the greenness to being part of an omnipresent greenness. All though the figure of the I of the poems differ considerably, Trotzig and Christensen both work with strategies to undermine the subject.²²

The rhetoric of the state of secrecy is incantation and naming, words calling things into being. Regarding this concept, the first verses of "Sommerfugledalen" resemble the openings of "alfabet" or "det" ["it"]. They are tales of creation. And they share Trotzig's understanding of language that Ulf Olsson in a review of her final collection of prose poems, "Sammanhang – material" (1996) ["Connections – Material"] refers to as "a naming of the world" and a "continual cosmogony and tale of creation expressed stubbornly again and again".²³ In her afterword to the Danish translation of Trotzig's "Dykungens Dotter" ["The March-King's Daugther"], Christensen lists the genres of the novel as "liturgy", "prayer, a meditation, a mass", terms that fit her own poetry as well.²⁴ But while Christensen's view on language draws upon Noam Chomsky's generative grammar as well as on German Romanticism, Trotzig puts special emphasis on a mystical Christian tradition, on icon painting and incarnation.²⁵ What they have in common though is a reluctance to accept the modernist critique of representation: language does not disrupt our relation to the world, language—in the words of Trotzig, but it might as well have been Christensen speaking—is "the founding of a relation to reality" ["upprättandet av ett förhållande till verkligheten"].²⁶ Lisbeth Larsson, as mentioned, points to this view on language as a feminist alternative to the critique of language within the male dominated modernism.

Their paths separate, though, once Trotzig, echoing Simone Weil, continues: "Träda i förhållande till verkligheten – gå in i den, krossas, krossas till slam, försvinna och ständigt försvinna mer"²⁷. ["Stepping into a relation to reality—entering it, crushed, crushed to mud, vanish and continue to vanish more and more"]. Reality is a key word in Trotzig, as it is in Weil. "All is real. All is

²² Christensen (2000: 40).

²³ Quoted from William-Olsson (1997: 170). Translation: D.R.

²⁴ Christensen (2018: 782). Translation: D.R.

²⁵ According to Magnus William-Olsson's reading of Anima in "Verklighetens ansikte" (1997), Trotzig's view on language is also indebted to the proskynesis of Christian rhetoric, the idea that the word prepares and opens the mind of the listener to the mystery.

²⁶ Trotzig (1959: 8). Translation: D.R. According to William-Olsson in "Verklighetens ansikte" Trotzig doesn't reach her final view on language until „Anima“, all though you can find formulations like the one from "Ett landskap" in the earlier works. In "Ordgränser" ["Word Limits"], her second collection of prose poems from 1968, language still is experienced as a border, a horizon.

²⁷ Trotzig (1959: 8). Translation: D.R.

equally real”, we read in the butterfly poem. The real lies at the bottom of suffering. In her prose especially, Trotzig peels all dignity off her characters until they are deprived of anything that separates them from the most elementary forms of life. At the very bottom the inhuman and all too human switch places and open toward a mystical point-zero-experience.²⁸ As Christensen puts it in her afterword to “Dynd-Kongens Datter”:

Ved at lade sine fornødte, udstødte, umælende personer trænge stadig længere ind i deres stoflighed og ubønhørlige delagtighed i verden, når hun til sidst ind til realiteternes mysterium, som når der intet er tilbage at tabe, af sig selv afgiver et guddommeligt lys.²⁹

By letting the degraded, expelled, inarticulate people penetrate still further into their own materiality and relentless involvement in the world, she enters, in the end, the mystery of what is real that, when there is nothing left to lose, by itself releases a divine light.

Style

The difference between the suffering in Trotzig and what Christensen in the thirteenth sonnet of “Sommerfugledalen” calls play becomes evident in their relation to butterflies. Trotzig’s butterflies are “mad”, and they are bodily beings. As angels they become “butterfly-human-body, a seeing feeling-body”. Her butterfly poem speaks of the “marvelous lean butterfly-body”, and flocks of them almost emerged from the mouth of the poet in the poem to Marina Tsvetajeva. Christensen’s idea of the butterfly is a fundamentally different one. In “Sommerfugledalen”, the butterflies are “en sværm af kemisk grundstof” [“a swarm of basic elements”], and “et vingeflimmer” [“this flickering of wings”].³⁰ Bodies transform, a “forslugen larve / forvandler sig” [“glutted caterpillar, / transforms itself”] into “sind” [“mind”] and the “Kålsommerfuglen” [“cabbage butterfly”] into “hvid sjæl” [“white soul”]. Things “lådne” [“furry”] and the “insektets krop” [“insect’s body”] is likened to a flower, “snabel” [“proboscis”] rhymes with “fabel” [“fable”], and the mating of the butterflies becomes “himmels-tumper” [“bits of sky”].³¹ The poet admits to her idyllic leanings:

Når sommerfuglen med sit billedsprog
kan overleve bedre ved at stjæle,
hvorfor skal jeg så være mindre klog,

²⁸ For Trotzig’s point-zero-experience, see Olsson (2000).

²⁹ Christensen (2018: 780). Translation: D.R.

³⁰ Christensen (2004: 3); Christensen (1991: Sonet I, unpaginated).

³¹ Christensen (2004: 4, 5, 6, 7, 9); Christensen (1991: Sonet II, III, IV, V, VII, unpaginated).

hvis det kan dulme angsten for det øde
 at kalde sommerfugle for sjæle
 og sommersyner af forsvundne døde.³²

When with their image-language, butterflies
 can use dishonesty and so survive,
 then why should I be any less wise,

if it will soothe my terror of the void
 to characterize butterflies as souls
 and summer visions of the vanished dead.³³

Christensen's butterflies continue to flicker across the border from body to soul, from reality to image, they vanish into air. Trotzig's, on the contrary, are amalgamated with the human body and exposed to a maximum of reality so they might reverse into their opposites. Christensen's butterfly soothes "my terror of the void", but does not avoid the rhyme "øde"/"døde" ["void"/"dead"], whereas Trotzig's steers directly towards a slow death only to be transformed into life or light.

Trotzig's expressive and fractured metaphors bring out the more seamless, lucid, and dreamlike style of Christensen. It is a style that to a large degree corresponds to the qualities that Italo Calvino—another fan of numbers and systems—shortly before his death suggested for the new millennium: a *lightness* that by distancing itself from realism frees the imagination; a poetic (as opposed to a conceptual) *exactitude* able to pierce butterflies with verbal needlework; *visibility* as intellectually serene and sharply drawn images; and *diversity* as in the ambition to systematically contain the whole universe.³⁴ I am not bringing in Calvino as a fellow writer for yet another comparison, but as a theorist. I regard the above-mentioned qualities as appropriate concepts in this context. Calvino suggested these qualities are characteristic of the 21st century, but they are rooted in the 18th. Given the stylistic ideals revealed in Calvino's concepts, we can begin to understand the lucidity and precision of Christensen's poetry in the context of enlightenment poetics. Her first collection of poetry was after all called "Lys" (1962) ["Light"].

The stylistic comparison offers yet another field of difference in similarity. That of luxury. Trotzig's style in "Anima" is luxurious. It may seem paradoxical given the continual impoverishment and debasement in her writing. But both are effects of her radical poetics. The debasement of human beings that in "Anima" culminates in the fourth of the eight parts in a suite parallel to Baudelaire's "Tableaux Parisiens" (1861), is countered by linguistic and metaphorical abun-

³² Christensen (1991: Sonet X, unpaginated).

³³ Christensen (2004: 12).

³⁴ Speed however, Calvino's fifth quality, is not an obvious quality in Inger Christensen. See Calvino (1988).

dance. There are exorbitant compounds and word piles, rich rhythmic and sound effects, and there are expressive visions, a downright iconolatry. I mention in passing, pointing out that they are compounds in Swedish: “dödsbesvärjelseskogarna” [“death incantation forests”], “miljonmunnade” [“Million mouthed”], “kopparskogarna” [“copper forests”], “Drömbrygggarpreparat” [“dream brewing preparations”], “ljusårsmångfaldigad” [“light year multiplied”], “fosterfamlande” [“fetus fumbling”], “musselskalen sjuder solens mäktiga ljusskål över havspegeln, ljus av ljus, tystnad-ljus-rörelse – orörlighetskärnan i solens uråldriga exploderande tystnad” [“the mussel shell sizzles the huge light shell of the sun, light of light, silent-light-movement—untouchable kernel in the sun’s ancient exploding silence”], “den oorganiska materiens anspåkslösa språk av ljusskiftningar” [“the modest language of light changes of the inorganic matter”], “Skimrande förkalkningar, hjärnesekret av sten, störtande återuppväxande stenväxtligheter” [“shining calcifications, brain secretion of stone, falling rediscovered stone growth bodies”].³⁵

It is a fractured and morbid, but also an exquisite, superfluous, and lavish language reminiscent of the “precious stones” of Mallarmé, and the famous refrain from Baudelaire’s “L’invitation au voyage”: “Luxe, calme et volupté”. Trotzig’s luxuriousness is not lost on Inger Christensen who reveals a love for precious word-stones and artificial paradises. It is luxurious and voluptuous, lavish and exquisite to list “cinnober, okker, guld og fosforgule” [“cinnabar, ochre, phosphor yellow and gold”], to see the Earth as “diadem” [“diadem”] populated by “blåfugl, admiral og sørgekåbe” [“As admirals, as blues, as mourning cloaks”] all “lavendel, purpur, brunkulssorte” [“in lavender, in crimson, lignite brown”].³⁶ “Sommerfugledalen” abounds with rich words and compounds. But so does the lists in “alfabet” with their sumptuous piles of named phenomenon, picked for the occasion with the aestheticism of a flower arranger. “Det malede værelse” (1976) [“The Painted Room”] is a cornucopia of Italian Renaissance decor. The long poem “Vandtrapper” (1969) [“Watersteps”] relish in roman basins, fountains, and lavish sport cars.

Conclusion

The tracking down of the constellation of motifs, eye/butterfly/death, revealed analogous patterns of creation between the two writers, lines of imagination that fell into place in similar forms, which may or may not be a matter of influences. The initial comparison of motifs led to a shared poetics. It offered a Trotzigian version of the condition of secrecy and fundamental parallels in language and subject philosophy offering a contemporary feminist literary context for the writings of Christensen. But it also pointed to a major difference between the

³⁵ Trotzig (1982: 6, 16, 25, 36, 67, 85, 67, 50, 14). Translation D.R.

³⁶ Christensen (2004: 3, 7); Christensen (1991: Sonets I and V, unpaginated).

real as a mystic category in Trotzig and Christensen's more seamless, lucid, and dreamlike style in which phenomena such as butterflies are continually crossing borders to non-bodily realms, her ability to fold the concrete into the abstract and vice versa. I suggested that the style of Christensen has the 18th century qualities— put forward by Italo Calvino—of lightness, exactitude, visibility and diversity. These qualities materialize as opposites to Trotzig's unruly, mystic, bodily and amalgamated butterflies. The mesh of nature, or the mesh in which nature is entangled, is animated blind matter in Trotzig, in Christensen it is a dynamic system, again accentuating Christensen's ability to fold the concrete into the abstract and her leaning toward transparency. In Trotzig, the movement towards the whole again and again goes through the impenetrable mesh of the real. Finally, because I read Trotzig, I realize that Christensen's poems are also luxurious, albeit, typically, with moderation. The balancing of sense and sensibility appears by comparison to be a key trait in her writing, again highlighting the classical inclination of her poetry.

New nuances or flavors in the texts are suggested by the comparison. Maybe I didn't find anything that I could not have found otherwise, but I see it more clearly now. It is difficult to say whether the comparison was a shortcut or a detour, either way it opens a conversation between two major women writers of Nordic modernism. Comparison is dialogue. Christensen states the following regarding detours and comparisons:

Æblet er kun grønt fordi der i sammenligningens rum findes så meget grønt, at vi er tvunget til at opfinde ordet grønt, for at vi i det hele taget kan orientere os, d.v.s. for at vi kan sammenligne [...] – ikke engang solen står alene med det at være rundt, også solen er kun rundt, som så meget andet er rundt [...].

I sammenligningens rum findes der derfor kun omveje. Uophørlige bevægelser fra grønt til grønt, fra rundt til rundt o.s.v., der aldrig kan sammenfatte f.eks. det runde eller det grønne.

Alligevel er vi mennesker sådan indrettet, at vi sætter livet ind på at bringe disse bevægelser i sammenligningens rum til midlertidig stilstand, så vi kan få overblik over de foruroligende omveje. Det lykkes måske ikke ligefrem bedste for dem, der kommer sandheden nærmest, men derimod for dem, der i lyset af netop sandheden, som de tror rykker nærmere, får samlet så meget materiale sammen, at sandheden igen kan rykke længere bort.³⁷

The apple is only green because there, within the space of comparison, exist so much green that we are forced to invent the word green, so that we, at least, can find our way, that is: so that we can compare [...] – not even the sun stands alone as round, also the sun is only round like so much else is round [...].

For this reason, there are only detours within the space of comparison. Continual movements from green to green, from round to round and so forth, that can never summarize say the green or the round.

³⁷ Christensen (2000b: 91-92).

Yet we humans are constructed to sacrifice our lives to bring these movements to a halt, so we may establish an overview of the unsettling detours. Perhaps those who come close to the truth don't succeed as much as those, who, in the light of the truth that they think are within reach, manage to gather so much material that the truth moves further away.

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