

## Feminist writing

The aftermath of the \*Second World War was not a context conducive to feminist writing, i.e. writing that challenges patriarchal norms and creates new discursive spaces. But from the early 1970s onwards, second-wave \*feminism inspired a wide range of feminist work, especially \*prose fiction investigating the conditions of women. By the mid-1980s, feminist writing had become a significant element in Scandinavian culture, and over the next couple of decades issues of gender, frequently explored in terms of language, subjectivity and the body, gave new prominence to genres such as \*drama and \*poetry.

With regard to political institutions, women in the Scandinavian countries had cleared the thresholds of legitimation (right to meet and speak in public), incorporation (right to participate in elections) and representation well before the war, but their participation in the exercise of power did not begin in earnest until the 1970s and 1980s. For a couple of decades after the war, women's economic activity remained relatively limited, with no marked increase occurring until the 1970s and 1980s. However in the early 1960s, gender roles became a major topic of public debate in both Sweden and Finland, thus anticipating second-wave feminism (the first wave had focused on women's suffrage) which reached Scandinavia from Britain, France and the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Creating a climate of political activism and foregrounding issues such as political and economic inequality (see equality), \*abortion and \*pornography, second-wave feminism also inspired a multi-faceted \*feminist culture that included art, music, theatre and film. Scandinavian feminist writing of the 1970s and 1980s is part of this highly visible and dynamic culture.

Elisabet Hermodsson's (SE) Disa Nilssons visor (1974) (The Songs of Disa Nilsson) subvert the gender roles in a work by a male poet published half a century previously and were set to music by the author. Together with Wava Stürmer's (FIN)

texts for Sångbok för kvinnor (1973) (Songbook for Women), they became central to the new women's movement throughout much of Scandinavia. Bjørg \*Vik's (NO) To akter for fem kvinner (1974) (Two Acts for Five Women) is an example of feminist drama: a realist play, its women characters are looking afresh at their roles. By contrast, Suzanne \*Osten's and Margareta Garpe's (SE) play Jösses flickor (1975) (Good God Girls) draws on Brechtian techniques to trace the history of the Swedish women's movement from a radical perspective.

The prose genres dominated Scandinavian feminist writing in the 1970s and 1980s, and the sheer range of genres is probably the most conspicuous feature. The report book was directly related to the consciousness-raising of second-wave feminism. Collective volumes such as Kvinder på fabrikk, I-II (1971, 1977) (Women in Factories) and Kvinder i hjemmet (1972) (Women at Home), both produced in Denmark, are typical examples. The genre was explored by individual authors too, with Maja Ekelöfs (SE) Rapport från en skurhink (Report from a Slop Bucket) causing a sensation in 1970.

Prose fiction throughout the 1970s and 1980s investigated the conditions of women from a range of perspectives. Liv \*Køltzow's (NO) novel Hvem bestemmer over Bjørg og Unni (1972) (Who Decides about Bjørg and Unni?) is an example of feminist realism, as are Dea Trier \*Mørch's (DK) Vinterbørn (1976) (Winter's Child, 1986), about a group of women and their experiences of pregnancy and childbirth, and Oddvør \*Johansen's (FAR) Lívsins summár (1982) (The Summer of Life), an exploration of motherhood and art. Novels such as Märta \*Tikkanen's (FIN) Män kan inte våldtas (1975) (Manrape, 1978) and Gerd \*Brantenberg's (NO) Egalias døtre (1977) (The Daughters of Egalia, 1985) expose gendered inequality by means of inversion.

Explorations of language and genre helped to shed light on the construction of gendered identity and on femininity in particular. In Kerstin \*Ekman's (SE) tetralogy about the building of a town (1974-83), the realist exploration of the conditions of women in the

first three volumes gives way in En stad av ljus (1983) (City of Light, 2003) to a first-person narrative that problematises gendered identity in the context of cultural and perceptual border areas. Covering a range of genres, the work of Eeva \*Kilpi (FIN) focuses on the construction of the male body as well as feminine autobiography, while Kirsten \*Thorup (DK) pinpoints gendered subordination by means of language in a novel such as Baby (1973) (Baby, 1980), and opens up critical perspectives on modern Danish society in the tetralogy about Jonna (1977-87). Eeva-Liisa \*Manner (FIN) has drawn on philosophy to formulate a social critique that also includes modern technology, while the novels of Bergljot Hobæk \*Haff (NO) illustrate a shift from realism to a growing preoccupation with the traditions of oral narrative and myth. Susanne \*Brøgger (DK) has pointedly mixed genres as she has investigated marriage, the nuclear family and monogamy from radically different angles, frequently including an autobiographical dimension. In the novels of Dorrit \*Willumsen (DK), the reification of woman opens up for the grotesque as exemplified by Programmeret til kærlighed (1981) (Programmed for Love), a novel about a living doll constructed by a female engineer who is taking seriously men's craving for the ideal woman. In the work of Svava \*Jákobsdóttir (IS), women's traditional roles are deconstructed by means of a concretisation of words and concepts that results in effects that are both fantastic and grotesque, e.g. in the short stories in Veizla undir grjóttvegg (1967) (Party beneath a Stone Wall).

By the mid-1980s, feminist writing had become a powerful element in Scandinavian culture, boldly exploring gender by means of a range of innovative techniques. Inspired by theoretical advances, the problematisation of language, subjectivity and the body has become central to much subsequent feminist writing, thus reinforcing the prominence of texts as new discursive spaces.

Cecilie \*Løveid (NO) made her breakthrough as a playwright in 1982 with the radio drama Måkespisere (Seagull Eaters, 1989). Her stage plays include Balansedame

(1984) (*Tightrope Lady*) and Dobbel nytelse (1990) (*Double Delight*), both exploring sexuality, communication and power in mother–daughter–father relationships, and using innovative visual effects to enhance–or subvert–the spectator’s involvement. Kristina \*Lugn (SE) had achieved a reputation as a poet writing about alienation in everyday language by the time she emerged as a playwright in the 1980s. Love and power relationships are recurring themes in her dramas for radio, TV and the stage.

The poet Inger \*Christensen (DK) is one of Scandinavia’s leading modernist/post-modernist writers. While the poems in det (1969) (*it*) investigate the relationships between the self, cosmos and language against a sophisticated theoretical background, the sonnets in Sommerfugledalen (1991) (*Butterfly Valley*) serve as a precise framework for an exploration of poetry and life. Pia \*Tafdrup (DK) frequently reads her poems in public, her performances reinforcing the texts’ preoccupation with the body. In her work, nature and cosmos emerge as Other in an *œuvre* characterised, in collections such as Hvid feber (1986) (*White Fever*) and Krystalskoven (1994) (*Crystal Forest*), by a consistent foregrounding of the aesthetic. The poetry of Eva \*Ström (SE) with its sharply focused images and metaphors frequently has the female body at its centre, with the search for feminine identity in Steinkind (1979) (*Steinkind*) involving role play; in Revbensstäderna (2002) (*Rib Cities*) the conflation of the anatomy of the city with the human body fuses not just humanity but life across the species boundaries. The work of Katarina \*Frostenson (SE) is preoccupied with the creation rather than the narration of experience, the fragmented texts that establish the shiny surface of the welfare society also opening up for that which can tear this order apart. Here language is matter, with the poems in Joner (1991) (*Ions*) constructing gender hierarchies in terms of linguistic power.

The French theorist Luce Irigaray’s understanding of language as a masculine construct, allowing no space for the feminine, has provided an impetus for the work of

Karin \*Moe (NO). Her novels Blove 1.bok (1990) (Blove. Book I) and Blove 2.bok (1993) (Blove. Book II) link the fluidity of language with the eroticism of the female body to satirise patriarchy. The prose fiction of Inger \*Edelfeldt (SE) develops a kaleidoscope of registers to investigate gender relations and the destructive impact of feminine socialisation, e.g. in the short stories in Den förunderliga kameleonten (1995) (The Remarkable Chameleon) and the novel Finns det liv på Mars? (2006) (Is there Life on Mars?). Preoccupied with themes such as art, sexuality and death, the *œuvre* of Vigdís \*Grímsdóttir (IS) has drawn both on magic realism, as in the novel Kaldaljós (1987) (Cold Light), and on forms that transgress genres and registers, as in the novel Z Ástarsaga (1996) (Z -- A Love Story, 1997). The novels of Monika \*Fagerholm (FIN) highlight their significance as artefacts, with Den amerikanska flickan (2004) (The American Girl) and Glitterscenen (2009) (The Glitter Scene) exploring the subjectivity of young girls and generations of women respectively in highly original prose.

Further reading:

Forsås-Scott, H. (1991) 'Egalitarianism and Feminist Consciousness: Feminist Writing in Scandinavia', in H. Forsås-Scott (ed.) Textual Liberation: European Feminist Writing in the Twentieth Century, London: Routledge

Forsås-Scott, H. (1997) Swedish Women's Writing 1850-1995, London: Athlone Press

Garton, J. (1993) Norwegian Women's Writing 1850-1990, London: Athlone Press

Møller Jensen, E. (ed.) (1997, 2000) Nordisk kvindelitteraturhistorie (History of Women's Writing in Scandinavia), vols. IV-V, Copenhagen: Rosinante-Munksgaard

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Helena Forsås-Scott