Article

Ragnhild Jølsen's "Det Forbandede Ord": A Fairy Tale of Light and Darkness in Female Desire

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Norwegian author Ragnhild Jølsen wrote compelling novels, yet her last collection of short stories in *Efterlatte Arbeider* [*Later Work*] reveals her artistry through her shorter works and literary fragments. In *Efterlatte Arbeider*, Jølsen crafts a fairy tale, "Det Forbandede Ord" ["The Forbidden Word"], that tells of a woman gifted with the ability to perceive the darkest evil and the purest beauty in nature, a gift that propels her into exploring the mysteries of nature and creation. Because "Den Forbandede Ord" was uncovered after Jølsen's death and was most likely unedited, many English-speaking readers have not read it, let alone analyzed it. Given a cursory glance, most readers would understand this story as a mere cautionary tale that warns women against acting on their curiosity about strange men. Due to Jølsen's nonconformity in her lifestyle and form of expression, however, I interpret Jølsen's story as one of female empowerment, one that portrays the light and darkness in women's experiences in the form of a folk tale to assert women's resilience.

Ragnhild Jølsen's Life

Jølsen's early life influenced the role of nature and the unconventional portrayal of women in her fiction. Jølsen was born in 1875 in the outer parts of Enebakk on a farm, but she later moved to Kristiania (present-day Oslo) when her father became bankrupt. At an early age, Jølsen expressed her thoughts on both the happiness and darkness in life in her diary, and she spent much of her free time wandering the city sights, even though it displeased her parents. When she was

twenty-one, her family moved back to Enebakk after her father once again became bankrupt and lost his ownership of a match factory (Simut 62), and she began to focus her writing on combining folk tradition with fairy tales and legends with a feminist perspective. According to literary historian and teacher Antoine Tiberg, Jølsen wandered for hours by herself in the forests near her ancestral farm. She wanted to learn all about humans and monsters, and she wished to encounter and challenge invisible creatures in the forest and gain mastery over them. "Det Forbandede Ord" captures her interest in the forest and its secrets as well as her experience of getting lost in the woods for days, an event that caused alarm and prompted people to come looking for her (Tiberg 32-33).

Though she lived a short life, Jølsen published a handful of novels and two short story collections. Between 1903 and 1907, Jølsen published her novels *Ve's Mor* (1903), *Rikka Gan* (1904), *Fernanda Mona* (1905), and *Hollases Krønike* (1906), as well as her short story collection, *Brukshistorier* (1907). In 1908, Jølsen died by overdosing on sleeping powders, and Tiberg found her last collection, *Efterladte Arbeid* (sometimes termed *Efterlatte Tekster*) in one of her drawers and published it (Fæhn 10-11). In all of her writing, whether fully developed novels or sketches of short stories, Jølsen incorporated different literary influences and aspects of folk and fairy tales in her work to portray the light and the darkness of women's experiences.

Critics have identified various examples of such polarities throughout Jølsen's work, a point that helps contextualize "Det Forbandede Ord." In Gisella Brouwer-Turci and Henk A. van der Liet's assessment of *Rikka Gan*, they observe that the farm setting becomes mysterious during the night, as it is filled with family histories and memories. Furthermore, Jølsen characterizes the two main female characters, Rikka and Fernanda, as "two women, one dark and one light" (Brouwer-Turci and van der Liet 56). This description not only foreshadows the strong female

characters but also hints at their fates. Ramona Simut observes that Jølsen's novel, *Ve's Mor*, includes a love triangle and emphasizes a mother's sexual drives that cause a psychological breakdown and the birth of a mentally disturbed child (62). Janet Garton describes *Fernanda Mona* as a continuation of Rikka's story, where the titular character struggles with similar issues as her aunt, Rikka. Having to maintain order in her wild household, Fernanda suffers between the need for financial survival and her own desires (76). In all her novels, Jølsen depicts a woman's need to express her erotic desires even though such bliss is short-lived.

Despite Jølsen's short life, critics praised her expressive qualities and strong depiction of emotional endurance. In *Illustreret Norsk Littteraturhistorie Siste Tidsrum 1890-1904* (1905), Norwegian critic Carl Nærup briefly discusses her work, as she had just published *Rikka Gan*. He aptly describes her passionate tone and states that her work possesses "rødere Blod og kraftigere Puls i hendes Prosa" [redder blood and a stronger pulse in her prose], further elaborating that Jølsen has "den same Natursyn paa Menneksene og det menneskelige, den same dunkle og dybtsøgende Mystik" [the same natural view of people and the human, the same dark and deeply searching mystery] (265). Unlike Nærup's assessment, other critics assumed her writing was a man's due to her depiction of erotic details, yet her ability to weave in elements from nature and attribute them to positive qualities in women reflects a fresh perspective on women's experiences outside of the moral ideal of marriage.

Jølsen admired Hans E. Kinck's method of incorporating psychological issues in his writing, and it inspired her to send him her first manuscript. Though he found the work fragmentary, he did appreciate its "trembling intensity … and great talent behind the feverish words" (Jorgenson 430). "Den Forbandede Ord," a story that explores the light and darkness of women's lives, utilizes a fairy-tale narrative to create social commentary on the need to use

literature to highlight women's experiences. Written in 1907, this short story highlights some of the norms of relationships between men and women, yet it asserts women's right to explore their erotic nature, though this story does not overtly portray a sexual encounter. During this time, Norwegian women gained more social and political rights and participated in literary culture by infusing aspects of the supernatural into their lived perspectives. Literary convention at the time incorporated gothic themes and the supernatural to exhibit psychological depth. In this story, the forbidden bond between the unnamed protagonist and the legendary Guldmanden [the Golden Man] constitutes her encounter with the sublime, a recurring theme in gothic literature. The protagonist meets the supernatural Guldmanden, who controls the nettle bushes, the mountains, and the flow of the rivers, and who ensnares her into a romantic commitment with him. She experiences terror when she first meets Guldmanden after wandering in the forest, yet this fear dissipates after their first meeting. Through her abilities to perceive both the terrifying and the beautiful, she experiences visions of the wonders of nature in addition to a love affair with him, though the narrator only hints at this affair by referring to the protagonist's decision to love him. Despite not being clear on the nature of Guldmanden, the narrator suggests that he bears a nefarious nature as he forbids the protagonist entry into a benevolent god's kingdom. While this predicament may suggest a tragic ending in the woman's life, Jølsen concludes her fairy story with the protagonist seeking advice from a mystical woman in the woods who tells her of women's advantage over men. According to the mystical character, women rise over men's issues and often find their solutions in life intuitively due to the nature of being women. Offering this mystical woman's advice as the story's conclusion, Jølsen emphasizes the balance between the light character (the mystical woman) and dark character (Guldmanden) to assert that female empowerment entails an acceptance of both factors.

Situating Jølsen's work in the Aftermath of the Modern Breakthrough

"Den Forbandede Ord" encompasses aspects of the Scandinavian Gothic and Jugendstil, typically found in the literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While her writing conveys aspects of Norwegian Neoromanticism, a subsection of literary culture that heavily emphasizes the supreme power of nature, Jølsen additionally incorporates gothic traits into her story. Describing the gothic tradition as a malleable genre with features such as tragic heroines, daunting settings, and hyperbolic plot designs, Kirstine Katsbjerg distinguishes the Danish gothic tradition as upholding a more subtle form of the sublime (13). The sublime entails an encounter with the fantastic at a safe distance, thus causing a thrill within the spectator. Scandinavian writers represented the sublime through psychological conflict until the Modern Breakthrough[1] (Katsbjerg 20). Although Katsbjerg mentions that the leading Danish literary critic, Georg Brandes, admonished both gothic trends and Romanticism, some writers during this time period hid their supernatural impulses in metaphors, as in the works of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen and Swedish writer August Strindberg. For Brandes, the aim of literature was to instruct readers, as he claimed that effective literature "increase[s] our knowledge, divest[s] ourselves of prejudices, and in an ever greater degree become[s] personalities" (62-63). His claim corresponds to the trend in literature that placed emphasis on representing social issues, such as debates about double standards for men and women in marriage, female sexual drive, women's emancipation, and prostitution (Brouwer-Turci and van der Liet 37). Yet, some Norwegian writers such as Jølsen, Tryggve Andersen, and Sigurd Mathisen went against the literary trends of their time and revitalized supernatural aspects such as gothic elements. Paula Ryggvik Mikalsen states that in

[1] The Modern Breakthrough was a literary movement from the 1870s to 1890s that focused on Naturalism and critiqued social and gender roles, as opposed to the preceding movement, Romanticism.

their works, "the characters and narrators became more unreliable, and the borders of the individual were more fluid, to the point of dissolving into the supernatural events" (24).

During the Modern Breakthrough, critical examination of social issues caused some writers to incorporate Romantic ideals back into their stories using realistic depictions of the supernatural. In her article "Flora of the Human Mind," Astrid Lorenz argues that Jølsen demonstrates a literary version of the visual Jugendstil aesthetic[2] that was popular in the mid-1890s until around 1905. Lorenz observes that this movement, like the Romantic and Neo-Romantic, emphasized artistic creativity and served as a reaction against the technological mechanization of life. Lorenz states that popular themes involved "a fairytale and dreamlike atmosphere, and touch[ed] on issues which at the time were taboo." Furthermore, Jugendstil in literary form is characterized by descriptions of plant life, flowers, and fantastic creatures, all aspects found in "Den Forbandede Ord." This literary technique has not garnered much critical attention since gothic scholars tend to focus on the role of the supernatural and macabre as depicting psychological tension rather than as a reworking of fairy-tale elements.

As Yvonne Leffler states in her study of the supernatural and fantastic in late-nineteenth-century Swedish literature, later writers incorporated the supernatural through the guise of realistic depiction to focus on inner psychological turmoil. When such narratives use the first-person perspective, they often utilize an unreliable narrator and focus on psychological disturbance, aspects that differ from earlier depictions of gothic themes in Romantic literature. Leffler posits that certain authors employ elements of the fantastic to "tell another story, to reveal something marginalized, something hidden or taboo" throughout depictions of eroticism in their narratives (58). Some examples include depicting taboo desires, thus prompting a character to see their

[2] Lorenz explains that this aesthetic includes the meandering line motif such as "flower garlands, women's flowing hair, dragons, and other fabulous animals."

psychological tension manifested through supernatural figures like ghosts or vampires. Certainly, Jølsen does not shame the decision of her protagonist but rather elaborates on the dark and lurid aspects of her curiosity, such as the protagonist's interest in loving Guldmanden, who shares similarities with the evil worm. In this regard, Jølsen comments on how women's curiosity for dangerous and mysterious men functions as a taboo, as social norms mandated that women choose wisely for the sake of marriage and family.

In their book *Nordic Gothic* (2020), Maria Holmgren Troy et al. further investigate why few details about gothic trends in late-nineteenth-century Nordic literature have gained critical attention. Much of the description of the gothic becomes subsumed under the Neoromantic trend during the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. Troy et al. discuss the Swedish writer Selma Lagerlöf, who uses forest landscapes to challenge her protagonists, as the forest is the site of not only fear and danger but also of self-transformation. In Lagerlöf's novel *Gösta Berlings Saga* (1891), the lady of the forest drives men crazy with desire and curses those who do not grant her wishes. Drawing on folkloric Scandinavian female figures, Lagerlöf depicts this mysterious woman of the forest as a *femme fatale* with animalistic qualities such as a red fox tail. In this series of stories, Lagerlöf uses this figure to teach another character—Märta Dohna, The Countess of Borg—a lesson about being selfish by cursing her to be eaten by magpies (Troy et al. 36-39). Troy et al. also cite Jølsen's novel *Rikka Gan* as exemplifying gothic literature since Jølsen sets her protagonist in a psychological conflict as she starts to find her identity with both her familial past and the history of her house (15). Thus, the dangers of nature bring out the psychological shortcomings of humans, whose flaws necessitate change. Similar to Troy et al.'s discussion of Lagerlöf's folkloric short stories, Jølsen's depiction of nature appears as a realistic world with supernatural aspects. Furthermore, Guldmanden's changing appearance emphasizes his ambiguity,

which is similar to Lagerlöf's depiction of the forest lady from *Gösta Berlings Saga* and her use of the *femme fatale* (Troy et al. 39), a point explained below. Additionally, the mystical woman suggests the role of the Sophia, the wise older woman archetype from Carl Jung's feminine archetypes, as well as the mentor character in Joseph Campbell's theory of the hero's journey. If viewed through the Jungian approach, this fairy tale portrays a woman's acceptance of her darker side by perceiving the confrontation between the protagonist and Guldmanden as the syzygy, or the merging of the feminine anima and masculine animus energy as the culmination of the journey (Arte 157). While one reading of the story does coincide with a heroine's journey of self-acceptance, reading Guldmanden as a distinctive character allows the protagonist an opportunity to overcome the sublime. Nonetheless, acknowledging the parts of the story that coincide with Jung's and Campbell's ideas allows the view of the protagonist as enduring psychological tension, grappling through darkness to find light.

Guldmanden as a Dark Character that Offers a Choice

Before the introduction of Guldmanden, the narrator opens the story on the protagonist's mother in a rural setting. She is aware of nature's beauty and evils—an important characteristic as it explains the protagonist's connection to Guldmanden. Young and in the arms of her mother, the protagonist is initially protected from the threats of nature. One day in a garden, a worm hisses at the mother, who accidentally falls and causes the child to see "Verdens Lys under Ormens røde Blik og under den graa Fugls jublende Sang" [the world's light through the worm's red stare and through the gray bird's jubilant song] (184). Jølsen sets up a contrast between the evil worm and the kind bird, yet the child's association with both enables her to see beauty in all kinds of nature. The child grows up loving the world's beauty, including the evil snake and the bird's peaceful

song on summer nights. The nature scenery recalls Jølsen's proclivities to set her characters in a "fairy-like farm surrounded by dark mysterious forests," similar to what she experienced in childhood (Simut 62). Given this context, Jølsen furthers the fairy tale format by imbuing the female protagonist with power to see beauty in both the light and the darkness of nature, thus presenting her with a choice that will bring conflict.

As a character representing the light, the mystical woman in the woods advises the protagonist that every object in nature has its proper role based on its physical form and function. Jølsen foreshadows the significance of the young woman's interaction with the mystical woman, who warns her of her fondness for the wild. This mystical woman "kjendte ogsaa Kjærligheds og Elskovs lunefulde gyldne dunkle Veie" [knew also love's whimsical golden dark path] (184-85). When the protagonist asks where the mystical woman gets her red berries, she responds that she gets them where the worm lives, but that one must practice caution and not wander in this area due to the chance of getting poisoned. This advice illustrates the conflict in the protagonist's journey as a process of individuation and growth. In his article, "Innocence as a Super-Power: Little Girls on the Hero's Journey," David Emerson criticizes the lack of faithful representation of the heroine in Campbell's monomyth and argues that innocence portrays a better perspective of women's roles as heroines, rather than merely creating warrior women who embody masculine traits within a woman's body. Emerson furthermore advocates for the value of using the "feminine qualities of the heroes, rather than merely the physical fact of being female" in his assessment of young girls' innocence in the coming-of-age process as part of their heroic journey (132). In his analysis of different young female characters, Emerson extols the feminine traits of compassion, of having a loving sense of community and family, and of emotional intelligence (143).

While it might be problematic to restrict these traits to women, Emerson critiques Campbell's hero's journey monomyth as recognizing only one kind of heroic process when in fact the emotional journey and coming of age of different characters demand different changes. As Terri Frontgia clarifies, the coming of age for male heroes entails overcoming challenges to bring about inner journeys and quests for identity, yet for girls maturity into womanhood develops from natural growth rather than a challenge their identities (16). As Lee R. Edwards asserts in her assessment of female heroism in the myth of Psyche and Eros, this tale shows how both characters, but more so Psyche, perform feats for the sake of love, showing how heroism "depends on the transforming and transcendent qualities that link social change to love and individuation for both men and women" (45). Since Jølsen bestows choice and powers on her young protagonist to decipher her feelings for the light and the darkness, she presents her with an opportunity to confront an internal conflict between fear and hatred. Unlike Edwards's claim about Psyche and Eros, however, much of this conflict depends on the protagonist's ability to love Guldmanden despite the barriers that arise.

The narrator introduces Guldmanden as a rumor within the village where other people report seeing a peculiar man who looks almost human yet who commands power over nature. For this reason, Jølsen portrays the protagonist's first encounter with Guldmanden as encompassing other aspects of nature, just like when she was a child and heard the gray bird's song while gazing into the worm's red eyes. When the woman first encounters Guldmanden, she hears a woodpecker whose knocking on a tree resembles a clock's ticking. Shortly after, she hears violin strings, thus luring her into his territory. This multitude of sensations also impacts her sight. As she steps over twigs on her way to the mountain, she discovers that they stiffen underneath her feet to become like concrete steps. Additionally, when turning to look back, she notices how impenetrable her

path has become. She observes that the nettles bend easily as she heads toward the mountain but then stiffen and sharpen when she tries to turn back. When she sees a small man striking a stone with a hammer, she freezes but does not feel fear. The narrator describes her state of mind, saying, "Hun kunde slet ikke føle Angst, for dertil var Synet for pudsigt, og blev længe staaende stille og betragte det lille Væsen, spørgende sig selv, hvad ialverden dette kunde være" [She could not feel fear at all, because the vision was too strange for that, and stood still for a long time and watched the little creature, asking herself what on earth this could be] (189). As the woman tries to make sense of this creature with human hands—"med korte Ben og stor Gevækst paa Ryggen" [with short legs and a large growth on the back] (187)—and with secretive movements like a worm, she uses her reason to determine that this creature cannot be a man but must be some mystical creature. The narrator describes the figure's movement, saying "pludselig gled Skikkelsen ned mod Jorden, lydløst, lynrapt, med Lemmerne sprikende som en Edderkop der firer sig ned af en Spindeltraad" [the figure slid down towards the ground, soundless, lightning quick, with its limbs throbbing like a spider clawing its way down a spider's thread] (190), and reporting how the nettles give way to make the woman fall as if she were in a spider's web, blurring the distinction between figurative and concrete meanings.

The strange description of Guldmanden with its darker implications suggests the role of the abject in gothic character portrayal. Using Julia Kristeva's ideas of the abject,[3] Katsbjerg describes the gothic body as a separation of boundaries between subject and object and gives doubles and uncanny others as examples (36). While Guldmanden may have a gothic body due to

[3] According to Kristeva, the abject is that which is oppositional to the subject. It is a "jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws [a subject] toward the place where meaning collapses" (2). In psychoanalytic terms, the abject also resists repression and transformation in the ego and causes symptoms of immediate revulsion, such as vomiting. After seeing Kristeva's comparisons to the abject as "a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you" (4), I do not see Guldmanden as exemplifying the abject due to his reciprocated feelings for the protagonist. He shares some qualities of the abject but lacks the traits required for the protagonist's revulsion and rejection of him.

his duplicitous appearance and ambiguity, he does not symbolize an internalized aspect of the protagonist as subject. Yet, he does inspire self-reflection within the protagonist when she has a sublime reaction to him. Furthermore, as Kristeva describes in regard to the sublime, the object eliciting a sublime response fascinates and makes the viewer sense beyond their capabilities of seeing, hearing, or thinking. Like the abject, the object that inspires a sublime reaction has numerous characteristics or "clusters of meaning, of colors, of words, of caresses" (Kristeva 12).

Though Guldmanden does not reveal the extent of his powers, he demonstrates them to the protagonist through his ability to manipulate his surroundings, making her see that he is part of the nettle bushes, mountains, stones, and trees. Even when she first stares into his eyes and becomes transfixed—similar to her first gaze upon the worm when she was a child—the woman perceives light within him but also visions of the nearby mountains, stones, nettles, and twigs that shelter him. This assertion coincides with Tiberg's assessment of Jølsen's experiences of being in the forest, which motivated her to create a protagonist who gains mastery over Guldmanden. Tiberg states, "Der var en umættelig trang i hende til at lære alt at kjende, i livets og i drømmenes verden, godt og ondt, sorger og glæder—alt vilde hun ha tak i med egne sanser" [There was an insatiable urge in her to learn everything to know, in the world of life and dreams, good and evil, sorrow and happiness—everything she could grasp at with her own senses] (33). Jølsen infuses a quest for knowledge about nature into the protagonist's perceptions. When she first engages with Guldmanden, she perceives "Som i et skinnende Speil saa hun Uren med Stenene, Neslen, og Kvistene. Og Fjeldvæggen … Og Skogen, som tegned sig mod Himmelen" [As in a shinning mirror, she saw Uren with the stones, the nettles, and the twigs. And the mountain wall … and the forest that drew up to the sky] (191). Once the young woman observes Guldmanden, she captures a more comprehensive view of the surrounding nature.

Such a strange characterization is typical of Jølsen's male lovers, who are depicted as being seen previously in dreams or as supernatural figures. This pattern also occurs in Jølsen's longer narratives, such as *Rikka Gan*, in which Pål Bjørby analyzes erotic fulfillment as something that goes beyond traditional feminine roles. Bjørby asserts that desire "figures as Rikka's all-consuming sense of identity, inner being, and purpose—and, when thwarted, ends in her sense of anguish, her violent outlashing, her demonic inner life" (135). Jølsen overturns domesticity by having Rikka confront the predicament of prostituting herself to the landlord of her farm to maintain her livelihood and that of her brother and his family (Bjørby 132).

As seen in her use of a dream male lover in *Rikka Gan*, Jølsen characterizes male lovers as supernatural men in order to suggest that women can overcome the risks they take to pursue their sexual interests. As Kristina Sjögren states in her analysis of *Rikka Gan*, Jølsen subverts the literary trend of the *femme fatale* by switching this role to a male character to create a *l'homme fatale* (476). As previously mentioned in their analysis of the forest lady as a *femme fatale*, Troy et al. explain the *femme fatale* as drawing on gothic horror to inspire change in Märta Dohna's character in Lägerlof's stories (2020). As a *l'homme fatale* figure, Guldmanden's changing appearance and fantastic abilities to lure the protagonist appear, as Troy et al. say, "sexual and dangerous, possibly lethal" (39), though the narrator provides no detail about any sexual encounter between them except to say that the protagonist begins to love Guldmanden after he takes her to his underground kingdom. In line with Sjögren's discussion of the significance of the *l'homme fatale* figure in *Rikka Gan*, Jølsen depicts Guldmanden as wormlike or snakelike, a symbol she uses in *Rikka Gan* to show the danger of men's sexual nature, though the protagonist feels no shame when she chooses to love him. Despite Jølsen's ability to depict sexual encounters in her novels, her lack of description of the protagonist's encounter with Guldmanden, other than her love for him, implies

an encounter by her choice alone. Furthermore, with Guldmanden as a *l'homme fatale* to lure her, the protagonist experiences an opportunity to forgo the mystical woman's warnings of the evil worm or snakelike creature to discover her own feelings regarding him. Through her decision to love him in his many manifestations, the protagonist is attracted to him as part of her attraction to the lush forest and the sounds in nature. Considering Jølsen's characterization of Guldmanden as part of the sublime in nature, the magnitude of the protagonist's choice becomes enhanced.

The Role of the Sublime

In *Critique of Judgement* (1790), Immanuel Kant explains how the sublime initially elicits a person's ability to reason to comprehend an object while also having a "momentary inhibition of the vital forces followed immediately by an outpouring of them" (98). As the mind attempts to comprehend the magnitude of a sublime reaction to an object, a person's imagination also activates and creates a feeling of temporary repulsion. While Kant postulates that an object of nature cannot be termed sublime, one might refer to an object's emotional effect on a person as sublime. Kant further explains how the sublime entails an internal search within a thought process to demonstrate an aesthetic response (98-100). This paradoxical feeling of awe and fear demonstrates the experience of how a person tries to understand the magnitude of the sublime response, yet in trying to comprehend it, might feel a momentary power over the object they are examining (106). The sublime reaction that Jølsen's protagonist feels as she deciphers the essence of Guldmanden in relation to his creation further deepens as he chooses to show her his power.

Thus, similar to Kant's explanation of the part of nature, such as the ocean in a storm,[4] the natural object is not necessarily a sublime object but rather the process by which the woman senses the different parts of nature, such as the mountain, the stones, or the nettles. By doing so, she comprehends that Guldmanden creates his domain, but he also transports her into other parts of his world. Furthermore, similar to Kant's notion of the sublime that a person who witnesses a terrifying form of nature feels pleasure due to also feeling safety, the young woman gains a form of pleasure that overtakes her initial fear. The feeling of the sublime develops within her as she continues to experience visions that show his domain, proving his superiority above a typical man since his identity includes the surrounding nature.

The duality in this experience is best understood through Kant's explanation of how a person can react in two different ways. Kant articulates the following to capture his nuanced feeling of the sublime: "the feeling of sublime is a feeling of displeasure that arises from the imagination's inadequacy, in an aesthetic estimation of magnitude, for an estimation by reason, but is at the same time also a pleasure" (114-5). In other words, a person might experience a paradoxical feeling of frustration and bliss when encountering an object that invokes the sublime. Despite being unable to estimate its vastness either in form or meaning, an object inspiring the sublime effect also reminds the person that they are using their judgement to rationalize it. Thus, when Jølsen's protagonist regards nature, she encounters Guldmanden in different ways to illustrate how she might be independent of him but also be above the laws that govern him. In this way, the young woman's experiences with him demonstrate how *she* allows him to explore her sexuality through her choice to love him. When the young woman meets Guldmanden, she feels both admiration and

[4] According to Kant, this description of the vast ocean in a storm comes up as examples to illustrate a sublime reaction based on a person's distance from it. Such examples indicate the internal reaction eliciting a sublime reaction as opposed to the beautiful that elicits admiration due to its external qualities (99, 111, 120).

fear as he takes her with him to explore his abilities as a supernatural being. Yet, crucial to understanding her experience with Guldmanden, her early memory entails curiosity for darkness through her association of it with beauty. In other words, the protagonist's ability to equate the beauty of the bird's song with the glaring red eyes of the worm explains her eagerness to consummate her love affair with Guldmanden: "Og føielige var Kvistene nu som før, ja, nærsagt har de hende til ham. Rødt skinned Guldmandens Øine som de røde Aarer i Bjerget, som Ormeblikket i Stenene. Bare syntes hun nok at en enslig Fugl sang saa vemodig i Skogen etsteds" [And the twigs were docile now as before, yes, they almost carried her to him. The Goldman's eyes shone red like the red veins in the mountain, like the worm's eye in the stones. It just seemed to her that a lone bird was singing so mournfully in the forest somewhere] (193). Guldmanden's mysterious air shows how he captivates the young woman; yet, despite his allure, she decides only at that moment whether to love him and give herself to him. This brief reflective moment of choosing to give herself to him mirrors an aspect of Kant's notion of the sublime as eliciting the human ability to use reason. As Melissa McBay Merrit explains, "our enjoyment of the sublime in nature makes available to reflection something about our essence as rational beings, not our instincts as animal beings" (38). Although the narrator explains how Guldmanden shows her the deepest part of his cave and the different hallways, this imagery functions as a metaphor for the protagonist's exploration of his world. She explores his realm just as the innocent lone bird sings mournfully, implying her loss of innocence. Thus, this imagery alludes to her sexual awakening and her pursuit of her desire even though the narrator does not explicitly provide details about a sexual encounter.

Yet, her decreasing fear of him and her power over his decision-making concerning creation in nature implies an intimate bond. When he takes her to the bottom of the earth, she

advises him to build a high tower to examine the stars and to plant trees to enhance the setting. In this manner, she manifests power over him even though he possesses supernatural abilities to create the objects she mentions. He agrees and tells her about his upcoming departure and absence for the time needed to create a high tower from the earth, thus showing her influence over him. The narrator provides no explanation about his disappearance, hinting that the young woman's strong convictions allow her to momentarily forget him and seek the company of another man.

Despite her strong feelings for this other man, the protagonist visits the forest only to see Guldmanden, who happens to reappear at that moment, as though she summons him through her thoughts. After he disappears again, the woman walks through the woods and uses her ability to sense him in the woods when she feels the blossoming of the forest: "Det bruste i Verdens de store Skoge—det hvisked i Verdens de dybe Haver—det klang i Verdens samstemmige Guitarer—ja, bruste og hvisked og klang—hun hørte, fornam det alt, der kun kom fra Vildmarken, Stenrøsene og Blaabjelderne, de giftige skjønne" [It roared in the world's great forests—it whispered in the world's deep Gardens—it sounded in the world's guitars that resounded in unison—yes, roaring and whispering and sounding—she heard, sensed it all that came only from the wilderness, the rocks and the bluebells, the poisonous beauties] (196). When the woman feels this movement in nature, she knows that Guldmanden has returned, showing how strongly she can sense him. After feeling that he has returned, she goes to his place in the forest where she had met him in the past. Having experienced the sublime when she first met him, she now experiences the might of nature through her interactions with him and can hear the roaring of the forest, the rocks and bluebells. By connecting beauty with poison, Jølsen brings the duality of darkness and light into the woman's ability to comprehend the forest and Guldmanden, as her association with him gave her some of his abilities. Due to her understanding of Guldmanden as encompassing nature, her actions of

anticipating him show an intellectual response, which helps her overcome her initial feelings of fear and disgust and to use her understanding of the changes in nature to sense his return. By feeling and understanding nature's movements more keenly than she did when she was younger, the woman internalizes her perception of nature and uses her mind to show domination over her initial fear. This change in her identity marks her growth in emotional fortitude and reasoning, traits she needs to overcome the troubling implications of her decision to love him. Similar to the challenge posed in her growth process, she perceives the light in Guldmanden, yet she proves her strength when she faces the dark consequences in her choices. Through an understanding of her choices, she crafts her identity and tests the limits of her love for him, and this newfound ability to anticipate him through the sounds of the forest proves to be the first of several trials that impact her choice to love him.

Another minor trial includes a brief description of the young woman's short-lived relationship with a mortal man and its subsequent end, prompting the return of Guldmanden and a revival of her declaration of love for him. Little is said of this relationship other than the woman's claim that this man is her wildest dream, one that tragically ends due to an unlucky ring. Instead, the narrative focuses on Guldmanden's return and his question if she has loved someone else, which prompts her to lie to him after finding that "havde han for stor en Magt over hende" [he had a great power over her] (196). Such power induces her to love him once more—presumably engaging in acts of intimacy with him—though she experiences feelings of hatred for him afterward. After years of visiting him and returning to her home, he promises her that he will show her something new and craft golden necklaces and chains if she visits him the next day. Despite the darkness that her choices entail, the woman bravely deals with the consequences, a point that

suggests how she experiences the sublime and shows power enhanced by her femininity and agency through her ability to love.

The Role of the Mystical Woman: A Source of Light

While not a major character in the story, the mystical woman gives the protagonist advice about Guldmanden and at the beginning and end of the story explains the advantages women have over men. If not for these wise words, the story would portray the lot of women negatively. As Sjögren states in her analysis of *Rikka Gan*, Jølsen alludes to Mother Earth and fertility goddesses when centering the role of women's sexuality (473). In Jungian terms, this mystical woman resembles the fourth level of the unconscious male aspect of women in the synergy of the anima and animus where, as Shubhangana Atre says, "a woman can bridge the gap between the conscious and the unconscious mind" (157). At this point of "Den Forbandede Ord," the protagonist looks almost as old as the mystical woman, suggesting that the protagonist's journey of love and acceptance of the light and the darkness in her choices has led her to a full life. While not much is given about the life of the mystical woman, she possesses the knowledge to explain the protagonist's issues from young age to maturity. Near the story's conclusion, the young woman, who has grown older, asks the mystical woman in the forest about the reason for her path in life. The woman asks, "Hvorfor … har de vært saa for mig altid, at der jeg har trodd at fange Lyset, der er altid Lyset blit mig forment?" [Why … has it always been so for me that where I have thought to catch the Light, the Light has always been formed for me?], and the mystical woman responds, saying "Det er … fordi du ellers havde naadd det der er over Menneskers Lod Over Roser og Torne gaar Menneskets Vei" [It is … because you had reached that which is above the lot of men. Over

roses and thorns goes the way of Man] with a voice that "lød som selve Skogens dybe Orgeltoner" [sound[s] like the deep organ tones of the forest itself] (200).

When the mystical woman says that the protagonist has "reached that which is above the lot of men" (200), she suggests that women's choices are part of their agency and above the restrictions binding men to their fates. When the mystic mentions that men's lives entail going over roses and thorns, she implies that men experience hardships yet do not overcome them. For this reason, she suggests that the protagonist can go beyond what is expected from men due to her natural ability as a woman to accept the consequences of her actions. Though the mystical woman provides little explanation other than these words, her quick response indicates that the protagonist accepted her fate so easily because it seems like the light was formed for her. This light occurs despite her previous choices that her curiosity led her to. These words reinforce the view that the young woman experiences a sublime event since a woman's fate entails reaching beyond what men can achieve. By doing so, their ability to choose and reason over these choices corresponds to emotional and logical faculties during a confrontation with the sublime.

Allusion to the Dynamically Sublime

As Yena Lee explains Kant's notion of the dynamically sublime, she states that unlike the mathematically sublime,[5] the dynamically sublime "demonstrates our superiority over nature in recognizing that neither internal nor external nature has power over us" (45). Through the power of reasoning, one overcomes a fear of the object in nature, hence overcoming the power from

[5] The mathematically sublime describes the type of sublime reaction one experiences when encountering a large object in nature that arouses one's reasoning to think of mathematical figures to measure it. Due to the fact that one only catches parts of the whole object in nature and cannot understand it in terms of exact measurements, one feels a bit disheartened. Nonetheless, the process allows a person to discover that they have the ability to reason, and this discovery itself is part of the sublime reaction (Kant 111-115, Lee 44).

within the person. Kant articulates the dynamically sublime as the realization that nature has no dominance over a person. A person comes to this idea after initially sensing fear when viewing a certain phenomenon, yet uses reason to comprehend the phenomenon that diminishes the fear:

> And it is only by presupposing this idea within us, and by referring to it, that we can arrive at the idea of the sublimity of that being who arouses deep respect in us, not just by his might as demonstrated in nature, but even more by the ability, with which we have been endowed, to judge nature without fear and to think of our vocation as being sublimely above nature. (123)

The key words "above the lot of men" and "our vocation as being sublimely above nature" imply an advantage in a person—in Jølsen's story, women—more powerful than the rules that guide men. While Kant describes an aesthetic experience that all humans can have in reaction to nature, the application of his words to this tale provides a way to clarify Jølsen's goal for the story as well as to disregard the negative implications of the young woman's curious relationship with Guldmanden.

In the conversation between the protagonist and the mystical woman, the narrator explains life's vicissitudes and their concomitant pleasures and sacrifices that enable women to accept emotional difficulties, such as having conflicted feelings for a supernatural man. For this reason, the younger woman phrases her question as wanting to "catch the light" but finding it "formed for [her]." Perhaps due to the adversity of her experiences, she seeks a particular goal of finding beauty in both the benevolent and frightening only to realize that her innate ability makes it seem like the goal—like the light—was already formed for her. In this concluding scene, the mystical woman leaves the reader with her advice to the protagonist and affirms that women's lot in life rises above that of men. Inherent in women's identity lies the strength and resilience to overcome any darkness.

Due to this facility, the protagonist's ability to reason and consider herself above nature and its potential dangers reflects the dynamically sublime.

The mystical woman's words gain significance when considering the protagonist's sacrifice to go with the benevolent god despite her commitment to Guldmanden, thus reflecting a component of the sublime in this religious conflict. Near the end of the story, before she seeks counsel from the mystical woman, the young woman hears the birds sing and sees a golden staircase leading to the sky towards "en ung Gud med to Løver for sin Fod," [a young God with two lions at his feet] (199). While she ascends to heaven, she hears Guldmanden's voice among the trees wail "Ormiliv, Ormiliv" [Worm life, worm life] (199), and she then throws herself back to the earth, a scene described as "i Sorg og Vildskab" [grief and wildness], (199) where she remains committed. When Guldmanden hisses at her with the words "worm life," he reminds her of her commitment to him, a choice that would forsake her entry into heaven with the benevolent god. The contrast between the benevolent god and Guldmanden shows that the woman's commitment to Guldmanden and nature supersedes her connection to her faith. Even though she initially reaches out to the benevolent god and expresses her preference to go with him, the fulfillment of her promise to Guldmanden demonstrates her own will to revere nature more highly.

The young woman experiences struggles and plights that affect all humankind, yet her ability to witness the beauties and terrors of nature provides her with an ability to reason through their influence. She uses her reason to overthrow the challenges presented to her, thus demonstrating agency over her actions. As Melissa McBay Merritt clarifies in her explanation of the dynamically sublime, a person who experiences fear in regard to an object yet who does not move away from it shows independence from that object through the act of reflecting on their safety, despite its potential danger (40). The protagonist holds onto her powers and uses her innate

knowledge of nature to exert her will over Guldmanden's. By not condemning her protagonist's actions for choosing to pursue her curiosity for Guldmanden, Jølsen asserts women's strength by showing how they overcome tragic consequences through their heroic journeys, experiences that consist of both choice and acceptance of consequences.

In choosing Guldmanden, the woman explores her preference for the darker aspects of nature, such as her fondness for the worm's gaze, but also her powers to perceive the sublime. By creating a character who perceives the simultaneously terrifying yet alluring, Jølsen captures an experience that is both intellectual and emotional, thus allowing her protagonist to grow through conflict. Through the sensuous details in her depiction of the forest and in the protagonist's paradoxical trepidation and fascination with Guldmanden, Jølsen exemplifies a woman's sexual agency without overtly describing a sexual encounter. While Jølsen provides power to her female character, she does not shy away from portraying the troubling aspects of following one's desire, such as suffering through conflicting feelings and forgoing entry into heaven. Despite this factor, the protagonist willfully maintains that Guldmanden does not control her desire, but that she chooses to love him on her own volition and accepts both light and dark aspects of desire. As Garton asserts in her analysis of Jølsen's last novel, *Hollases knønike,* a woman's confrontation with her sexuality entails the acknowledgement of not only the "summer nights, pastel colors" (77) but also the darker tones of life. By doing so, she becomes less vulnerable to its unappealing aspects. Despite the darker consequences of her choice, the protagonist experiences peace in her final discussion with the mystical woman. Had Jølsen written this story in the social critical style, she would have shamed her protagonist by portraying her as a social outcast. If she had taken a more decadent style, her protagonist would be a victim of Guldmanden and would have suffered in his realm. Furthermore, especially when considering Jung's and Campell's ideas, Jølsen hints

at a female heroic journey through a choice of love, though the fairy tale suggests rather than fully fleshes out these details. Through peaceful and reflective conversation with the mystical woman, the protagonist ponders her choices but also knows that her fated strength outshines the darker implications because she has been true to herself.

In writing a fairy tale about the acceptance of fate, Jølsen takes a bold step by making a woman's choice to love and embrace her individuality the main conflict. Though she does not provide details of other moments except for the passing of time before her conversation with the mystical woman, the fragmentary parts of the story make sense as a tale about a woman fated to choose a forest life through her ability since childhood to see its beauty in both the light and the darkness. The woman, in a sublime encounter, gains power over Guldmanden through her choice to love him, despite meeting someone better and receiving taunts from birds. While one might be tempted to categorize this fairy tale as a social critique, an example of gothic literature, or a heroic tale, its varied aspects as an example of all three make this tale a mysterious story of fate. Similar to Edwards's assessment of Psyche and Eros as a tale of the liberation of love as "the most heroic one of all," (49) "Den Fordbandte Ord" reveals the power of a woman's choice, even if her lesson entails psychological challenges. Part of the protagonist's journey through the light and the darkness involves acceptance of the consequences of making a promise and of staying true to one's word.

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