

# **Contesting the Collective Memory of Nazism in Norway: The Case of Kjartan Fløgstad's Novel *Grense Jakobselv* (2009)**

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## **Abstract**

This article conceptualizes Kjartan Fløgstad's novel *Grense Jakobselv* as a literary site in the public process of collective remembering. Fløgstad's stated intention for this novel was to challenge the received Norwegian memory of Nazism as an 'unrefined' mass phenomenon and to emphasize instead its basis in the cultured and educated elite. Drawing on James W. Wertsch's work on the term 'collective memory' in the humanities and social sciences, the article explains the novel's memory project and its contemporary political significance. After critically examining the novel's portrayal of a connection between Nazism and bourgeois humanist culture, I look into aspects of its controversial reception. While acknowledging the flaws identified by some critics, I propose that Fløgstad's ultimate aim is to promote a more self-critical use of political memory and history in the public sphere.

## **Keywords**

Norwegian literature, historical fiction, Nazism, collective memory

In 2009, Kjartan Fløgstad published *Grense Jakobselv*, an audacious and genre-blending novel that challenges Norway's collective memory of Nazism and warns about potentially totalitarian tendencies within contemporary democracies. *Grense Jakobselv* is a multivocal and self-referential text full of playful fictional names and pseudo-historical details woven in with depictions of actual historical figures and events. It is an intellectually ambitious novel that addresses the Nazi occupation of Norway, Cold War national security organizations, the relation between National Socialism and Germany's educated bourgeoisie, and the unacknowledged after-effects of fascism in postwar Europe. Fløgstad's narrative ranges widely in time and place, from Munich in the 1930s to Northern Norway during the occupation years to multiple European locations in the early twenty-first century.

A key aspect of *Grense Jakobselv* is its challenge to a received Norwegian memory image of Nazism as something that appealed mostly to an uneducated segment of the lower class. This solidified collective memory was something Fløgstad explicitly identified and targeted in public statements around the time of the novel's publication. As an alternative, the novel spotlights Nazism's support from Germany's sophisticated cultural elite. The purpose of this memory project, I will argue, is to make a space for self-critical reflection about what Adorno called 'the survival of National Socialism *within* democracy' (in a line that the novel quotes). Although Fløgstad won the Nynorsk Literature Prize for the third time with *Grense Jakobselv*, it was also received as a problematic work of historical fiction. Critics found fault with its depiction of a link between German humanism and Nazism, and with its lopsided treatment of Nazism's class appeal, among other problems. In what follows, I place an emphasis on the public memory implications of Fløgstad's novel, viewing *Grense Jakobselv* as a fictional act of collective remembering that engages in conversation both with historical research and with Norwegian perceptions about the nature of Nazism. In doing so, this article draws its theoretical premises from James W. Wertsch's interdisciplinary work on collective memory, including his book *Voices of Collective Remembering*.

## A Grotesque Double Body

*Grense Jakobselv* features two main narrators: the first is Otto Nebelung, an opportunistic German who follows the charismatic Nazi Paul von Damaskus from their youth in interwar Munich, to Northern Norway during the occupation, and on to Damaskus' postwar success as a lawyer and attorney general in the Federal Republic of Germany. The second, younger narrator is the Norwegian Alf Magnus Mayen, the illegitimate son of a German SS officer. Mayen grows up in the bourgeois conformity of postwar Bærum, outside Oslo, eager to distance himself from his family's National Socialist past. He pursues a legal career and ends up working for the Norwegian State Police Security Service during the Cold War. Mayen is the frame narrator, in that he is responsible for editing the diaries, documents, and other archival texts that make up Nebelung's narration. However, the two narrative levels are historically and politically intertwined in ways that complicate and eventually collapse the framing structure.

Late in the novel, Mayen finds a manuscript written by a Marxist academic that quotes from Adorno's 1959 lecture 'Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit,' which is translated to English as 'The Meaning of Working through the Past.' Adorno considers 'the survival of National Socialism *within* democracy to be potentially more menacing than the survival of fascist tendencies *against* democracy' (Adorno 1998: 90, Fløgstad 2009: 330). Mayen first quotes this in German, and then the novel allows itself a didactic moment of explanation in Norwegian. The Adorno quotation reveals the contemporary political relevance of Fløgstad's highly citational narrative. As Fløgstad himself has clarified on several occasions, a basic goal of this novel was to spark examination of enduring but unacknowledged remains of 'fascism' within postwar and contemporary democratic states. Fløgstad evidently finds this Adorno quotation quite important, since he also used it as an epigraph for an article published in *Samtiden* in 2009, which addresses the same issues as *Grense Jakobselv*. The title of this article, 'Parkens grøde: Om lov og urett i krig og etterkrigstid' (The Growth of the Park: On Law and Injustice in War and Postwar), contains one of Fløgstad's punning allusions to Knut Hamsun. He

explains: 'Som tittelen på dette essayet tyder på, handlar det ikkje om fascisme i utmarka, som i *Markens grøde*, men om den kultiverte og velpleide fascismen på oppdyrka mark' (Fløgstad 2009: 11). (As the title of this essay indicates, it is not about fascism in outlying areas, as in *The Growth of the Soil*, but about the refined and well-groomed fascism on cultivated land). The basic metaphorical opposition that governs Fløgstad's memory project is announced here: on one side the uncultivated, rough, and peripheral, and on the other the refined, cultured, and central.

*Grense Jakobselv* concludes with a dazzling passage in which the two narrators' bodies physically merge into one: the erstwhile Nazi Otto Nebelung fuses with the liberal-democratic lawyer Alf Mayen in a car crash in Northern Germany, one day after the funeral of Paul von Damaskus in 2008 (the novel's opening scene). Mayen narrates how the double body was found:

Vi var kasta så hardt mot kvarandre at vi var blitt til *ein* kropp, til ein og same kropp. Vi likna ikkje på kvarandre, men vi passa saman, vi gjekk i hop som om vi var laga for kvarandre ... Vi var to menneske lukka inne i kvarandre. Jernkrossen på brystet hans som eit stikk i mitt hjarta. Dei blodflekka bokstavene frå avisa hans. Augo hans såg djupt inn i meg, mine i hans, med skrifter frå alfabetet i avisa som eit raster, midt imellom oss. Vi passa fint saman. Hand i hanske. Sto godt til kvarandre. Gjekk sjeldan godt i hop. (Fløgstad 2009: 434-435)

(We were thrown so hard into each other that we became *one* body, one and the same body. We didn't resemble each other, but we suited each other, we fit together well, as though made for one another ... We were two people closed in on each other. The Iron Cross on his chest sticking into my heart. The blood-spattered letters of his newspaper. His eyes looked deep into me, and mine into his, with the letters from the alphabet on the newspaper like a screen, right between us. We suited each other well. Fit like a glove. Went well together. Rarely do two fit so well together.)

In the final pages of the novel, the fused body of Nebelung and Mayen continues to function with its two backs turned out toward the world – it even becomes an object of anatomical study at the university. The double body, now the combination of both the novel's two narrative voices, reflects about how its 'inner life' is found everywhere, recognized by people who blush with shame. Presumably, the double body's inner life is an object of recognition and embarrassment for its audiences because it symbolizes a troubling inner likeness of the fascist and the democratic – or 'the survival of National Socialism *within* democracy.' As the novel ends, the double body descends the ladder of public spectacle, ending up at circuses and on daytime cable TV channels. Eventually it will be mined for organ transplants, since it has two of each inner organ. This strange ending, with its darkly comic and politically pointed magical realism, encapsulates the novel's admonitory message about the authoritarian potential of the contemporary national security state.

### **A Literary Act of Collective Remembering**

Acts of collective remembering tend to be dialogic, responding to previous formations of memory in a given society, especially those that have obtained an official or unquestioned status (Wertsch 2002: 91). Seen in this respect, the silent interlocutor in *Grense Jakobselv* is Norwegian society's received memory of Nazism as a movement comprising the uneducated and the uncultured mob. Not only in the novel itself, but also in a series of other articles and interviews, Fløgstad challenged this memory. In an interview with *Aftenposten*, the author explained his own initial shock:

'Etter å ha levd i en forestillingsverden, som mange andre, om at den tyske nazismen var et produkt av pøbelveldet, har det vært et sjokk å oppdage i hvor stor grad nazismen faktisk var et eliteprosjekt'. (Bjørkeng 2011)

(After living, like many others, with an imagination of German Nazism as a product of mob rule, it has been a shock to discover

the degree to which Nazism was in fact an elite project).

The article 'Parkens grøde' aims to communicate this discovery, describing for the readers of *Samtiden* how an educated German elite of academics, lawyers, and doctors enthusiastically supported National Socialism (Fløgstad 2009: 7). Fløgstad reports that German doctors showed themselves to be especially willing to join the Nazi party (almost half of them did after 1933). He also points to the support for National Socialism on the part of philologists and other academic humanists, and he observes that over half of the participants at the Wannsee Conference possessed doctoral degrees (Fløgstad 2009: 9-10). Fløgstad's dialogic aim of remembering in 'Parkens Grøde' is to problematize whatever reassuring collective memory today's professional class of doctors, lawyers, and professors might have of Nazism as something attractive only to the uneducated masses, in order to incite them to an ethical and political self-examination.

In 2014, Fløgstad continued his effort to contest collective memory in an article about Nazi doctors in Germany and Norway published in *Tidsskrift for Den norske legeforening* (The Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association). The article was based on a lecture given to the same organization.

På meisterleg vis klarte nazismen å mobilisera breie lag av folket, gjera dei medskuldige i og belønna dei for brotsverka til nasjonalsosialismen. Men framfor alt var den eit elitefenomen ... I ettertid er det flokkar av øldrikkande bøllar som har prega vårt bilde av nazistane. Endå meir skremmande er dei velutdanna, velfødde skarane av champagnemenneske frå dannelsborgarskapet som var overtydde om at dei berre kunne forsvara klasseprivilegia sine med nazistane ved makta. (Fløgstad 2014)

(In a masterful way, Nazism managed to mobilize broad classes of people, to make them complicit in and reward them for the crimes of National Socialism. But above all, it was an elite phenomenon ... In retrospect, flocks of beer-drinking hooligans

have characterized our image of the Nazis. Even more frightening are the well-educated, well-born bands of champagne drinkers from the cultured bourgeoisie, who were convinced that they could defend their class privileges only with the Nazis in power.)

Fløgstad evidently thought that his audience of Norwegian doctors needed to be disabused of the notion that Nazi sympathizers were mostly roughs swilling beer or neo-romantics worshipping nature in some peripheral wilderness. The 'more frightening' Nazis were the champagne-drinkers who came from the privileged center of the European bourgeoisie. As Fløgstad surely knows, historians find it difficult to define the appeal of the Nazi party solely in terms of class (cf. Fritzsche 2008: 9, Kershaw 2015: 231). However, Fløgstad's aim is to reshape the collective memory of Nazism in Norway, which he thought required a shift in emphasis.

A helpful distinction can be made between collective *memory* and collective *remembering*, as James V. Wertsch has done in his work on these topics. Noting that the concept of collective memory is used across many disciplines in the humanities and social sciences without a uniform meaning, Wertsch and his co-author Roediger offer clarification by tracing three oppositions: between collective memory and collective remembering, between collective memory and history (as a discipline), and between individual and collective remembering (319). Collective memory refers to a static and solidified base of knowledge – 'vårt bilde av nazistene' (our image of the Nazis) – while collective remembering functions as a 'space of contestation' in which public memory is repeatedly represented and negotiated (Wertsch & Roediger 2008: 319). The authors list museums, history textbooks, and national holidays as examples; historical fiction can also be considered as such a space of contestation. In Fløgstad's case, we can describe *Grense Jakobselv* as a site of collective remembering with a political agenda that aims to contest and renegotiate the Norwegian public memory of Nazism.

In the thought-provoking reception of *Grense Jakobselv*, some critics thought that Fløgstad was performing a helpful public service by challenging the popular image of Nazis as uncultured brutes and

by shifting attention instead to the complicity of the educated elite (cf. Jakhelln 2010). However, as I will discuss below, others found Fløgstad's challenge to collective memory flawed. These critical responses produced interesting reflections on the relationship between *Grense Jakobselv*'s intricate narrative form and what some saw as its simplistic political and historical content. Fløgstad even found himself in a debate with the historian Tore Pryser about the appropriate use of historical sources in a work of fiction.

To understand the general opposition between collective remembering and history, we can again look to Wertsch and Roediger, who like many scholars in memory studies build on the seminal work of Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, and Jan and Aleida Assmann. As a process distinct from history, collective remembering selects, amplifies, or distorts historical evidence in the service of present identity needs or arguments. Such a process is often politically fraught, and while historians reject invention and fabrication, collective remembering encourages it (Wertsch & Roediger 2008: 320). As the authors note, 'the processes involved are usually tied to schematisation and simplification that stand in contrast to the aspirations of analytic history' (Wertsch & Roediger 2008: 321). Collective remembering engages in the creation of a usable past and often advances an identity-based or political project. Therefore, its methods do not adhere to the regulative ideals of objectivity and transparency in the use of sources, which guide history as an academic discipline.

As a historical novelist with overt political aims, Fløgstad criticizes a memory image of Nazism that has been too one-sided ('flocks of beer-drinking hooligans'). His aim is not to restore accuracy, but rather to amplify another one-sided image ('bands of champagne drinkers'). Indeed, almost the entirety of the novel's plot and characterization are designed to promote Fløgstad's pre-conceived counter-memory narrative. To recognize this – that there is a rhetorical and presentist purpose to the design of the novel – need not be a disparaging criticism. *Grense Jakobselv* is a committed work of imaginative fiction written from a twenty-first-century leftist perspective alarmed about the threat of totalitarian developments within democracy. Part of its project is to correct – perhaps even *overcorrect* – the public memory of Nazism



in order to better advance such a political message. Before looking further into aspects of the novel's critical reception, let us spend some more time with the fictional world itself.

### **An Equation of Nazism and Bourgeois Humanism?**

Fløgstad's challenge to the collective memory of Nazism actually has two trajectories within *Grense Jakobselv*. The first traces how Nazis in many fields moved with impunity into postwar positions of power in various fields and within liberal-democratic societies and institutions. The second involves the connection the novel attempts to draw between Nazism and the European humanist tradition. In relation to the first of these, Adorno also writes in 'The Meaning of Working through the Past,' although Fløgstad does not quote this, that 'ambiguous figures make their comeback and occupy positions of power for the sole reason that conditions favor them' (Adorno 1998: 90). In her commentary on the novel, the historian Anette Storeide provides more specifics on how this was possible, noting that a series of West German laws in the years around 1950 helped reintegrate persons with a Nazi past into public careers (Storeide 2010). In *Grense Jakobselv*, a Nazi doctor and euthanasia proponent called August Glahn, whose name is a not-so-subtle double reference to Hamsun, is normalized after the war as a veterinarian; he later disappears to South America (Fløgstad 2009: 59, 251). Otto Nebelung's narrative follows the movement of Nazi professors into postwar university positions, while also tracking how Paul von Damaskus provides legal justification to allow former Nazis, such as the 'mercy-killing' Doctor Glahn, to go unpunished (Fløgstad 2009: 269, 370). Damaskus describes the Nazi years as 'ein kollektiv rus, som sette røyndomsorientering og medvitet om skilnaden på godt og vondt ut av kraft' (Fløgstad 2009: 269) (A collective intoxication, which disabled one's sense of reality and one's conscience of the difference between good and evil). Those who acted in this context did so 'under påverdnad av nazismen' (under the influence of Nazism) and should not be considered criminally accountable, according to Damaskus. His reasoning is clearly supposed to be read as an outrageous abuse of legal authority and an example of the persistence of fascist power in

the postwar context.

Paul von Damaskus himself is the novel's main example of a rehabilitated Nazi who moves into a highly lauded position: the novel opens with his funeral in Northern Germany in 2008. As narrated by Alf Mayen:

I gravfølget så vi høge utsendinger frå det offisielle Tyskland, frå forbundsregjeringa i Berlin, rett nok berre på statssekretærnivå, frå delstatsregjeringa i Slesvig-Holstein, frå Rotary, og frå Bundesnachrichtendienst i Pullach, ikkje minst. Førande presseorgan som Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Die Zeit og Der Spiegel hadde alt trykt omfangsrike nekrologar, som alle la vekt på den avdødes eineståande sivilcourage og det moralske eksempelet han hadde stått for gjennom stormfulle tiår i tysk og europeisk historie. (Fløgstad 2009: 5-6)

(At the funeral procession we saw high-ranking emissaries from official Germany, from the federal government in Berlin, albeit only at the secretarial level, from the state government in Schleswig-Holstein, from the Rotary, and last but not least, from the Federal Intelligence Service in Pullach. Leading organs of the press like Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Die Zeit, and Der Spiegel had already printed voluminous obituaries, all of which emphasized the extraordinary civil courage of the deceased and the moral example he had been through stormy decades in German and European history.)

This is an early and revealing example of how Fløgstad's novel illustrates that, in Adorno's words, 'ambiguous figures make their comeback.' A more important and problematic aspect of the novel's collective remembering project is the second trajectory its emphasis on the continuity of Nazism and the European humanist tradition. Indeed, the novel is preoccupied by the combination of high culture and brutal violence in certain Nazi figures. Again, Fløgstad targets the Norwegian memory image of Nazism – that it was somehow only appealing to 'uncultivated' groups. As an alternative, the novel gives us

multiple examples of barbaric cruelty coexistent with 'high' bourgeois humanist culture and practiced by the civilized elite.

After opening with the funeral of Paul von Damaskus, the novel flashes back to Munich in 1929, to the classroom of Rektor Gebhard Himmler, father of Heinrich Himmler. In this scene, narrated by Otto Nebelung, Rektor Himmler embodies 'danningsborgarskapet' (the cultured bourgeoisie); he loves Greek and German philology and literature above all else. He is rumored to have broken ties with his son Heinrich for the latter's involvement with Hitler and the rising Nazi movement (Fløgstad 2009: 16). We see Rektor Himmler explain his disappointment with his students' Greek abilities as a sign of the times, a symptom of 'samanbrotet til danningsborgarskapet' (the collapse of the cultured bourgeoisie) and of 'forfallet av borgarlege dygder som orden, plikt og ære' (Fløgstad 2009: 18) (the decline of bourgeois virtues of order, duty, and honor). Paul von Damaskus emerges from this context as an excellent student, adored by the teacher. The narrator Otto Nebelung first meets Damaskus in this scene. Their relationship is noticeably modeled on that of Serenus Zeitblom and Adrian Leverkühn in Mann's *Doktor Faustus*.

After the Himmler classroom scene, *Grense Jakobselv* switches narrators and jumps ahead almost fifty years to a November day in 1978. At the University of Oslo, Paul von Damaskus, now a renowned legal scholar and attorney general, gives a lecture to the law faculty about political terrorism, including the Baader-Meinhof Gang. Damaskus begins his lecture with a quotation from an as-yet-unpublished book by his former classmate, the real-life author Alfred Andersch, who during the Nazi period was one of Germany's inner emigrés. The title of the book, *Der Vater eines Mörders* (The Father of a Murderer), points to its content: it was a story about Heinrich Himmler's father, the *Rektor*. Damaskus mentions in his speech that Andersch was his classmate at the gymnasium during his youthful days in Munich. Then he quotes a famous question from Andersch's afterword: 'Schützt Humanismus denn vor gar nichts? Die Frage ist geeignet, einen in Verzweiflung zu stürzen' (Fløgstad 2009: 24). The English translation of this passage from Andersch reads, with a bit more context:

Let me merely note that it is worth reflecting that Heinrich Himmler – and for this my memory supplies the proof – did not grow up in the dregs of society, as did the man to whose hypnosis he succumbed, but in a family of the old-established, classically educated bourgeoisie. Does this mean that humanism offers no protection whatsoever? The question may well plunge one into despair. (Andersch 1994: 92)

The former Nazi Damaskus applies this question to the case of the educated members of the Baader-Meinhof Gang, although in the Andersch text, it concerns the Himmler family. For Andersch, and for the German controversy about humanism in which this question took a significant place, the issue was whether classical humanistic learning – *Bildung* – could act as a bulwark against political evil, terrorism, and atrocity. The despair that Andersch points toward would result from a loss of confidence in ‘humanism’ to provide an armature against barbarism. Fløgstad has his former Nazi perform a significant decontextualization: Damaskus takes the question from the context of the Himmler family and the relation between humanism and Nazism, and relocates it in the context of how the West German state should respond to radical left-wing terrorism. The irony is of course that Paul von Damaskus is himself an embodiment of the first context: he is Fløgstad’s thesis character for the novel’s message about the continuity, rather than opposition, of Nazism and humanism.

As a third example, let us look at another one of Otto Nebelung’s early narrative segments, which has the English title ‘Reflections on Violins’. This title plays on the close sound of ‘violins’ and ‘violence’ as an illustration of the continuity theme. It is also an allusion to *Reflections on Violence*, a book by the French social theorist Georges Sorel, which had a significant influence on the development of Italian Fascism (Paxton 2004: 33). Set in Berlin in 1938, ‘Reflections on Violins’ begins with Paul von Damaskus, now a young Nietzsche-loving SS-officer, visiting the office of SS-General Reinhard Heydrich. (Later, in 1942, Heydrich was the chair of the Wannsee conference and thus a key planner of the Nazi genocide.) In this imagined conversation with the fictional Damaskus, Heydrich argues that the best leaders

in the *Schutzstaffel* come from the humanities, an elite group of select individuals including philologists, folklorists, theologians, etc. According to Heydrich, humanists were better suited than scientists to fulfill the historical mission of National Socialism and to understand its sacrificial demands. In the same chapter, Otto Nebelung tells of his delight in meeting the professors who raised the swastika flag over the university in Tübingen in 1933, because this act showed 'at nasjonalsosialismen ikkje kom frå dei deklasserte utkantane av samfunnet, men var ein sentral del av den borgarlege og veltutdanna eliten ... Vi var eliten, eliten var med oss' (Fløgstad 2009: 71) (that National Socialism did not come from the declass   margins of society, but was a central part of the bourgeois and educated elite ... We were the elite, the elite was on our side). This is Nebelung's voice and his own self-description, but the author's agenda of collective remembering shines through with clarity.

Nebelung (and Fl  gstad) depict Heydrich as an elegant and handsome man from 'det gamle, kultiverte danningsborgarskapet' (the old, cultivated bourgeoisie) who enjoys fencing, sailing, has deep philosophical interests, and plays violin and cello with virtuosity. Nebelung sentimentally wonders to himself after hearing him play: 'Har eg nokon gong h  rt ei meir kjenslev  r framf  ring av Bruchs fiolinkonsert?' ('Have I ever heard a more sensitive performance of Bruch's violin concerto?'). Heydrich provides Nebelung reassurance that National Socialism is deeply rooted in German bourgeois culture; indeed, for Nebelung, this is what allows it to oppose the debased modern culture of gypsies and Negroes (Fl  gstad 2009: 75). According to Damaskus, the German musical and literary tradition functioned as a guarantee 'for at den harde og n  delause tenesta vi var sette til    utf  re, p   ingen m  te viske ut den h  ge kulturen vi kom ifr  , eller forr  a oss som menneske. Tvert om var det slik det edlaste i oss kom til uttrykk' (Fl  gstad 2009: 75) (that the hard and merciless service we were chosen to carry out, would in no way destroy the high culture we came from, or debase us as humans. On the contrary, it was in this way that our noble qualities expressed themselves). At moments like this one, Fl  gstad depicts the Nazi appropriation of bourgeois culture as a precondition for the SS officers' ability to commit acts of extreme

violence and brutality, all while maintaining a self-image as cultivated Europeans. *Grense Jakobselv* emphasizes the high level of humanistic education that the best Nazis required in order to undertake the requisite sacrifices for the new order (Fløgstad 2009: 137). Humanistic culture and learning are hence depicted as enabling and facilitating barbaric violence, rather than opposing it in any way.

The pun on violence and violins illustrates Fløgstad's memory project: to draw attention to a deeply ingrained cultural elitism in National Socialism and to spotlight the complicity of high cultural tradition (opera, classical music, literature, the humanities) with barbaric Nazi violence. By doing so, the novel intends to do more than replace one class-based understanding of Nazism with another. It also aims to demythologize contemporary humanist understandings of education as essentially a political and moral good, by focusing on 'kombinasjonen av høg kultur og nådeløs handling' (the combination of high culture and merciless action) in historical figures like Heydrich and Himmler, and in his fictional creation Paul von Damaskus. The novel's provocative conflation of Nazism and humanism provides a basis for its closing message about the monstrous unity of the totalitarian and the democratic, conveyed by the startling image of the both narrators' bodies smashed into one circus freak.

## **A Complicated Reception**

Given the suspect excesses of its historical claims, it is not surprising that *Grense Jakobselv* was met with more than a degree of skepticism. The critical reception sparked interesting debates about the novel's leftist-populist politics and its narrative forms, as well as its relation to history (as an academic discipline). Some critics wondered whether Fløgstad's complex and playful narrative art was strategically appropriate for his pedagogical aims. Others flatly rejected the novel's arguments about the links between bourgeois humanism and Nazism, while still others charged that Fløgstad's challenge to the public memory of Nazism in Norway was overly simplified or out-of-date and unnecessary.

To take a few helpful examples, critics Kaj Skagen in *Dag og tid* and Lasse Midttun in *Morgenbladet* identified problematic weaknesses of the novel both in terms of its thematic construction and its narrative unreliability. Skagen praises the novel for its bold themes, but notes that the central claims would require a level of historical and philosophical argument that the novel's narrative practice undermines. He rightly argues that Nazism didn't grow out of 'bourgeois liberal humanism' but rather out of its breakdown or self-destruction. Skagen criticizes Fløgstad's attempt to demonstrate an 'inner unity of Nazism and postwar democracy' and objects to the novel's overall political worldview, in which the alleged opposites 'totalitarian' and 'democratic' in fact form a grotesque union. Similarly, Midttun finds the presentation and selection of facts in the novel so tendentiously one-sided that Fløgstad undermines his authority to correct any remembered image of Nazism. In other words, both critics found that Fløgstad's narrative games and his willingness to engage in intellectual-historical simplifications detracted from the validity of its collective memory project.

The journal *Vagant* published a noteworthy series of responses to the novel's philosophical themes and historical representations. In the longest of these, Stein Sørensen discusses *Grense Jakobselv* in relation to Mann's *Doktor Faustus* and Jonathan Littell's controversial 2006 novel *The Kindly Ones*. Sørensen criticizes *Grense Jakobselv* for relying on a simplistic set of binary moral and social-class oppositions: a good, ethical, working class 'folkelig' culture is set in opposition to an evil and elitist 'high culture' projected onto both Nazism and the bourgeois humanist tradition. Also in *Vagant*, Torgeir Skorgen argues that Fløgstad reductively hypostasizes the term 'humanist,' mixing up various meanings in order to construct a stable and uniform historical object that he then unveils to be guilty by association with Nazism. Skorgen points out that the supposed shock of realizing that Nazism had an elite and cultured side should hardly be a surprise. A similar point was made by the historian Anette Storeide, who questions the novelty of Fløgstad's 'discovery' and asks, 'er det virkelig så overraskende at utdannelse og brutalitet ikke er gjensidig utelukkende?' (is it really so surprising that education and brutality are not mutually exclusive?). She continues:

At mange nazister fortsatte i sine stillinger etter 1945 og at mange av dem var velutdannede jurister, universitetsprofessorer, leger og økonomer er gammelt nytt, selv om det ofte forties. Det vesttyske studentopprøret på siste halvdel av 1960-tallet begynte som en revolt mot foreldre- og besteforeldregenerasjonens nazifortid og bidro for alvor til å sette søkelyset på det vesttyske samfunnets manglende oppgjør med nazistene. (Storeide)

(That many Nazis continued in their positions after 1945 and that many of them were well-educated lawyers, university professors, doctors, and economists is old news, even though it is often hushed up. The West German student revolt in the latter half of the 1960s began as a revolt against the Nazi past of their parents' and grandparents' generations and seriously contributed to spotlighting the lack of a settling of accounts with the Nazis in West German society.)

For Storeide, the Nazi stereotypes that Fløgstad sees himself as challenging are 'for lengst gått ut på dato' (long ago expired), so the novel's work of memory targets a stale myth. However, at the same time, she concedes that these facts are 'often hushed up' without specifying the level at which this occurs and why. Could this silencing be a feature of collective memory rather than of academic history?

Perhaps what the historians regard as a stale myth retains its efficacy as a feature of Norwegian collective memory – the realm in which Fløgstad originally intended to intervene. Fløgstad himself replied indirectly to these criticisms in *Morgenbladet*:

Lamslåtte har også ei lang, lang rekke lesarar av *Grense Jakobselv* blitt. Etter at boka kom ut for snart eit år sidan, har alle slags folk, kjende som ukjende, tatt kontakt direkte på gater og streder, eller via telefon, sms, brev og e-post. Gjennomgangsmelodien har vore at dette visste vi ikkje, det kan då ikkje vera sant? Og så har dei funne ut at det er det, det er sant. (Fløgstad 2010)



(A long, long line of readers of *Grense Jakobselv* have also been stunned. After the book came out almost a year ago, all sorts of people, known and unknown, have contacted me directly on the street, or by telephone, text message, letter, or email. The repeated refrain has been, we didn't know this, this can't be true? And then they have found out that yes, it is true.)

The discovery shock that Fløgstad originally reported as his own was replicated in his readers' collective response: 'dette visste vi ikke' (we didn't know this). There is a revealing difference between what historians think of the novelty of Fløgstad's message and what a reportedly large reading public thinks. Taking Fløgstad's account of his readers' reactions at face value, we might conclude that the novel has had a substantial effect in the realm of collective memory, even if professional historians consider it old news.

History and collective remembering can be distinguished in terms of opposing methods, but the two are intertwined and mutually reliant in the construction of public perceptions of the past. Collective memory (as a received body of knowledge) relies to a great extent on historical research that is publically disseminated in various media, including historical novels and films. As sites of remembering, historical novels and film are not purely objective vehicles of transmission, but 'spaces of contestation' in which memory representations are challenged and renegotiated (Wertsch & Roediger 2008: 319). Seen in this way, Fløgstad's project of collective remembering in *Grense Jakobselv* is an attempt to disseminate historical research in the public sphere and to open a space of contestation in which the received memories can be rethought and perhaps revised. The project is not perfect: it is true that *Grense Jakobselv* can appear overly binary and schematic in its thinking about the class appeal of Nazism, and the novel's guilt-by-association treatment of 'humanism' leaves much to be desired. At its best, however, Fløgstad's memory project is not an attempt to replace one simplified myth with another, but rather an attempt to create a more self-critical public, perhaps one that might even blush with shame at the grotesque double body in the novel's final passage.

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