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Entrapment and Escape:
Narrative Techniques in Representations of
Sexual Abuse in Herbjørg Wassmo's
Huset med den blinde glassveranda

Several months ago, I attended an evening talk at my daughter's primary school, which was given by a Glaswegian authority on paedophilia. The purpose of her lecture was to introduce parents to a new sex education programme aimed at primary school children. A major part of her talk focussed on methods used to empower children facing the threat of sexual abuse by strangers. She covered typical strategies used by paedophiles in their approaches to children and areas popularly targeted by child sex offenders. The speaker also touched upon the reality of sexual abuse within the family, although she did not discuss this problem at any length. In spite of the fact that most child sexual abuse is perpetrated in the home of the child,¹ the subject of incestuous abuse is still a taboo topic which the public prefers to ignore. The talk was very poorly attended: apart from the teachers, there were only about ten parents in the audience. At the end of the evening, as we were filing out of the hall, one of the parents turned to me, and said: 'Was all that really necessary? Surely it was all a bit far fetched?' This person's reaction to the talk was perhaps symptomatic of the 'blindness to abuse' referred to by Roland C. Summit, who in his article 'Hidden Victims, Hidden Pain' outlines society's continuing avoidance to face up to the reality of child sexual abuse:

It is my thesis that child sexual abuse exists in society as a phenomenon that is most conspicuous for its presumed absence. One of the clues to how important it is may be the effort we devote to keeping it out of sight.²

No-one knows the true extent of child sexual abuse, but what *does* emerge from the research is that 'the vast majority' of child sexual abusers are male.³ Emily Driver, a barrister who helped found the Incest Survivors' Campaign, quotes the numbers of sexually abused girls in Britain as one in eight and sexually abused boys as one in twelve. Her figures are taken from a 1984 MORI poll.⁴ An American study undertaken by a self-help support group, 'Parents United', reveals a far more extensive problem, estimating the figures of sexually abused children as one in four girls and one in seven boys.⁵ Whatever the true figures are, and the very nature of child sexual abuse ensures that many survivors will never tell their story, the sexual victimisation of children appears to be extensive. Novels such as *Huset med den blinde glassveranda* by the Norwegian writer Herbjørg Wassmo contribute towards a greater public awareness of this terrible phenomenon.

In *The Music She Hears: Point of View and Technique in Women's Writing on Childhood Sexual Abuse*, Ellen Klosterman writes:

...one appropriate use of literature is to raise people's consciousness about the impact of social and political issues on women's lives, including childhood sexual abuse.⁶

When I first read *Huset med den blinde glassveranda* ('The House with the Blind Glass Veranda' or 'The House with the Blind Glass Windows' as it appears in the American translation by Roseann Lloyd and Allen Simpson⁷), I was struck by the uncompromising and thought-provoking portrayal of the young protagonist's experiences of sexual abuse by her stepfather. For me personally, the novel raised my own awareness of the problem of sexual violation against children, and I found myself wanting to find out more about the prevalence and implications of sexual violence and society's attitudes towards this taboo topic. Titles such as *The Best Kept Secret*, *Secret Survivors* and *The Conspiracy of Silence* reflect the public attitude to incest and the stigma suffered by its victims. In an interview with Catherine Sandnes, Herbjørg Wassmo states that when *Huset med den blinde glassveranda*

first came out in 1981 she was inundated with calls from people critically in need of emergency psychiatric treatment. This reaction to her book was something that she was totally unprepared for. In her own words:

Og jeg kunne ingenting gjøre. Det lå på meg som et mareritt.⁸
[And there was nothing I could do. It weighed upon me like a nightmare.]

Given Herbjørg Wassmo's brave and sensitive handling of the theme of incest, such a reaction from people one would assume to be victims of sexual abuse is perhaps not surprising. The narration, although in the third person, is often filtered through the consciousness of the young protagonist, allowing the reader an insight into her thoughts and feelings. The sexual abuse of the main character Tora is thus very much related from the point of view of the victim. Ellen Klosterman argues that this type of narration, which she refers to as '3rd person semi-omniscient', is commonly used in literature about child sexual abuse. Her definition of this mode of narration applies also to the use of point of view in *Huset med den blinde glassveranda*:

...third person omniscient allows room for the narrator to shape the perception of the reader through the selection of details and word choices reflecting the experience of one character over another.⁹

In a narrative concerning the theme of sexual abuse, point of view is crucial in determining the reader's interpretation of events, and in influencing our attitude towards the characters involved. How is the perpetrator of the abuse represented in the novel? What are the stylistic indices that signal a particular character's viewpoint? How does the writer depict sexual abuse from the victim's point of view? These are some of the questions I will attempt to address in this article.

In her 1982 article on *Huset med den blinde glassveranda*, Jorunn Hareide refers to the fact that several male critics of the book failed to realise that the abuse was ongoing,

believing it to be an isolated assault.¹⁰ She argues that such a misunderstanding of the text must mean either that these readers found the subject matter uninteresting, or that they simply failed to penetrate the figurative, poetic language of the novel. I suspect that the former explanation is probably the most accurate, for Wassmo's writing is by no means obscure. I would argue that a reader who can overlook the perpetual reality of abuse as experienced by the young protagonist, has merely skimmed over the book. The fact that these particular readers were male is an interesting phenomenon which undoubtedly warrants further investigation, but which I shall not be exploring in this article. However, their failure to recognise the persistent nature of sexual abuse as it is depicted in the novel is, I feel, a relevant point of departure for examining in some detail the portrayal of incestuous abuse in *Huset med den blinde glassveranda* and its impact on the central character, the adolescent Tora.

Disavowal and Disembodiment

The conflicting phenomena of entrapment and escape are fundamental to the sexually victimised child, and these diametric themes are predominant in *Huset med den blinde glassveranda*. Tora's trapped state is illustrated in the following extract, where about to take a bath, she hears Henrik enter the house and is too terrified to move:

Tora satt dørgende stille i kroken sin. [p.52]
[Tora sat perfectly still in her corner.]

The adjective 'stille' is intensified by the accompanying adverb 'dørgende': Tora's stillness is complete. She crouches like a hunted animal, paralysed by fear. The possessive pronoun accompanying 'kroken' identifies the 'corner' as specifically Tora's, suggesting that for the abused child, it is an habitual place of hiding. By definition, this hiding-place is temporary and elusive. To the sexually victimised Tora, it is the last and smallest of a sequence of spaces into which she

is driven within the actual boundaries of the living space. In her trapped physical state, she must find some means of minimising the impact of her abuse.

Ellen Klosterman describes one of the 'coping mechanisms' used by sexual abuse survivors:

Victims experience alienation from their own bodies which originates as a form of denial used to distance themselves from the abuse as it happens. This process of distancing is called "dissociation" and may be described by a victim as "leaving my body" or "going up into my head".¹¹

In *Huset med den blinde glassveranda*, Tora's fear of her abuser and her actual experience of the abuse itself induces a state of disembodiment. Physically trapped, she escapes into a place that is at once limitless and void: a state of nonexistence which symbolises her feelings of denial and worthlessness:

Det var ingen i hele verden som hette Tora. Hun var fløyet inn i ingenting. Det var bare en stor stillhet. [p.53]

[There was no-one in the whole world who was called Tora. She had flown into nothing. There was only a great stillness.]

This process of 'disembodiment' is engendered by Tora's terror of her abuser, and is a recurring motif in the novel. In *Child Sexual Abuse: Feminist Perspectives*, Emily Driver refers to 'the mental distancing techniques' used by sexually abused children 'to retreat or fly away from the fear induced by the experience.'¹² Tora's disavowal of her own identity in the pronouncement 'Det var ingen i hele verden som hette Tora' (There was no-one in the whole world who was called Tora) is reinforced through the sentence 'Hun var fløyet inn i ingenting' (She had flown into nothing'). There is an interesting tension here between the verb of motion 'var fløyet' (had flown) which expresses spatial distance and suggests an end-point, a final destination, and the prepositional phrase 'inn i ingenting' (into nothing). The reader is alerted not only to

Tora's desire to escape from the diabolical space which her room has become, but also to her self-effacement, encapsulated in the abstract noun 'ingenting' (nothing). If we look at the description of Henrik's entrance into Tora's room as she is taking her bath, the significance of 'ingenting' becomes even more evident:

Hun så og så. At døra åpnet seg. Så ham velte inn som et stort loddent berg. [p. 53]

[She saw and saw. Saw the door open. Saw him flounder in like a large shaggy mountain.]

The contrastive clauses 'Hun var fløyet inn i ingenting' and 'Så ham velte inn som et stort, loddent berg' convey the antithesis between Tora and the larger-than-life manifestation of her abuser, particularly conspicuous in the disparity between the verbs 'fløyet' (flew) and 'veltet' (floundered). Implicit in the bird metaphor is a quality of weightlessness which contrasts with Henrik's clumsy brutishness, his maleness further emphasised by the adjective 'loddent' (shaggy). There is a further contrast between the verticality of Tora's 'flight' away from her place of entrapment and Henrik's bulldozing advancement towards it. The simile 'som et stort loddent berg' (like a large shaggy mountain) cogently expresses Tora's perception of her abuser. To the young girl, he appears foreign, immense. She sees him not as a human being, but as a hairy, formless hulk. He is as overpowering and sinister as the mountains that form part of the surrounding landscape:

Regnet hadde overfalt dem, og nedetter fjellhamrene lå skodda tykk som gammel ondskap. [p.37]

[The rain had suddenly fallen upon them, and the fog covered the steep mountain crags like ancient evil.]

In her trapped physical state, Tora is unable to escape from Henrik's systematic violation of her body, and she must therefore resort to some other means of distancing herself from his abuse of her. At times, this 'abandonment' of her body appears to occur at will:

Da gikk Tora utenom sin egen kropp og vilje... [p. 8]
[Then Tora went out of her body and will...]

On other occasions, Tora's process of disembodiment seems to occur spontaneously and completely outwith her control, as in the following excerpt which describes Tora's reaction on hearing Henrik at her bedroom door:

Det var som om hodet hennes utvidet seg. Ble stort og uformelig og fløt bort så hun ikke hadde styring med det lenger. [p. 53]

[It was as though her head expanded. Became large and formless and floated away so that she no longer had any control over it.]

Tora's feeling of powerlessness is reflected through meronymic or 'body part' agency, the lack of control over her own body reiterated in the final clause. The image of 'floating', of a sense of weightlessness, provides a powerful contrast to her abuser's lumbering movements:

Henrik beregnet verken dørkarm eller dør. Han hadde ikke skritt, han subbet bare inn. [p. 6]

[Henrik didn't take doorframes or doors into account. He didn't have footsteps. He just shambled in.]

Tora's 'flight' of the mind from the fear she experiences on an earthly plane into a 'nothingness', where there is 'only a great stillness' presents a powerful contrast to her abusive stepfather's lumbering and forced invasion of her space and premeditated penetration of her body. This contrast is further illustrated in the following extract, in which Henrik's abuse of Tora is imminent. Trapped within the restricted physical boundaries of her bathtub, Tora's acute vulnerability is intensified by the nakedness of her young body:

Hun holdt såpestykket inntil kroppen. Prøvde å dekke seg med to tynne armer og et såpestykke. [p. 53]

[She held the piece of soap tightly to her body. Tried to cover herself with two thin arms and a piece of soap.]

Tora's attempt at defending her dignity is cogently expressed through the verb phrase 'prøvde å dekke seg' (tried to cover herself). Her endeavour to shield her nakedness is futile, for all she has at her disposal are 'two thin arms and a piece of soap'. The occurrence of 'to tynne armer' without the possessive pronoun, and in a coordinated noun phrase with the inanimate noun 'et såpestykke', conveys an impression of Tora's arms being somehow extraneous to herself, the adjective 'tynne' poignantly expressing their inadequacy to protect her slender, immature body.

The Victim's Viewpoint

Paul Simpson and Martin Montgomery, in their article 'Language, Literature and Film: The Stylistics of Bernard MacLaverty's *Cal*', argue that 'mental process verbs' such as 'saw' and 'heard' are 'clear stylistic indices' that narrative events are being described from a particular character's viewpoint:

The fact that these processes...exclusively express human perceptions serves notice that events are being mediated through the perceptual domain of a single character.¹³

In *Huset med den blinde glassveranda*, 'mental process verbs' are a characteristic feature of the narrative, and serve to contrast Tora's experiences of abuse with the failure and unwillingness of those around her to 'see' her pain, this 'blindness' embodied in the metaphor of the novel's title. Rakel Christina Granaas points out that "'seeing" can be interpreted as "knowing".¹⁴ 'Blindness' can therefore by the same token be equated with ignorance: a failure to 'see' or to 'know'. In Tora's case, even her own mother is 'blind' to her daughter's suffering. Tora is alone with her terrible knowledge: she is the sole witness of her own violation.

In the scene we have been looking at, where Tora is caught unawares in her bath, the recurrence of the verb of perception 'så' suggests that the recounted events are from Tora's perspective:

Kniven under listen bevegte seg sakte. Hun så og så. At døra åpnet seg. Så ham velte inn som et stort loddent berg. [p. 53]
[The knife under the moulding moved slowly. She saw and saw. That the door opened. Saw him flounder in like a large shaggy mountain.]

In this extract, which we looked at earlier, the focal point of the narration is the movement of the knife 'under the moulding'. There is no visible agent, the door providing a barrier between the source of the action and the viewer. The repetition of the verb 'så' in the clause 'Hun så og så' serves to extend the process of 'seeing' on the temporal plane and, simultaneously, to define and arrest the point of focus on the spatial plane. The emphasis is on 'seeing' as a process to which Tora commits her entire will in the sense of 'watching'. The repetition of the verb of perception also emphasises Tora's heightened sense of awareness in her trapped state. The main clause 'Hun så og så' (She saw and saw) is intransitive and we assume the object of Tora's focus to be the subject of the previous sentence, i.e. 'kniven' (the knife) in 'kniven bevegte seg sakte' (the knife moved slowly). As we read on, however, we encounter the subordinating conjunction 'At' (that) introducing the subordinate clause 'At døren åpnet seg' ('That the door opened') and we thereby discover a subtle shift in the sense of the verb 'så'. A new movement enters Tora's field of vision, the 'opening' of the door signifying the collapse of the protective barrier Tora has tried to build by wedging a kitchen knife into the door-frame. The breaking of the syntactic rule which does not allow a subordinate clause to stand on its own forces us to go back and to read again the sentence 'Hun så og så', thus ensuring our increasing involvement in this key scene and reinforcing the reader's identification with Tora. The full stop separating the main clause from the subordinate clause creates a break between the

'movement' of the knife and the 'opening' of the door, thus emphasising the sense of timelessness evoked by the repetition of the verb 'så'. The punctuation here produces the added effect of slowing down the process of the 'door opening', the prolonged action heightening the scene's progressive mood of tension.

The Dynamics of 'Dangerousness'

The opening sentence of the novel introduces the neologism 'Farligheten', which recurs throughout the narrative:

Hun visste ikke når hun først ble klar over den: Farligheten.

Det var lenge etter at hun flyttet inn i det vesle spiskammerset bak kjøkkenet, fordi mora mente hun skulle ha et lite rom for seg selv. [p. 5]

[She didn't know when she first became aware of it: the Dangerousness.

It was long after she had moved into the little pantry behind the kitchen, because her mother thought that she should have a little room to herself.]

Wassmo has coined a word that embodies the essence of Tora's sexual victimisation. 'Farligheten' is a state, a condition. It suggests something that is permanent and inalterable. It is the state of being dangerous: 'Dangerousness'. Its occurrence as a proper noun in the opening sentence further conveys its magnitude and its separateness. We are told that Tora's knowledge of 'farligheten' occurs after she has moved into the pantry. Its location behind the kitchen, and its diminutive size indicated by the adjective 'vesle' (little), suggests entrapment, a cell-like space where Tora is cornered by her abusive gaoler. Rakel Christina Granaas illustrates the symbolic relevance of the pantry as Tora's bedroom:

...Tora ikke orker å spise for hun er selv en som blir spist og fortært. Hun sover attpåtil i et spiskammers, ligger vel anrettet og venter på den sultne Henrik.¹⁵

[...Tora can't manage to eat for she is herself being eaten and devoured. Furthermore, she sleeps in a pantry, lying served up, and waits for the hungry Henrik.]

The intended function of the pantry as a bedroom, a place of privacy for the adolescent girl, is horribly altered through her stepfather Henrik's appalling transgressions. 'Farligheten' converts the room from a secure space of her own to a place where she is sexually violated: abused and raped. In the American translation of the novel, 'farligheten' appears as 'the danger,'¹⁶ a direct translation of the Norwegian noun 'fare'. Herbjørg Wassmo's choice of the word 'farligheten' to express Tora's experiences needs to be addressed, I believe, when looking at the depiction of sexual abuse from the young protagonist's point of view. 'Farligheten' is specific to Tora's terrifying plight, but she is unable to define her subjection as sexual abuse, the term 'farligheten' reflecting the terrible strangeness of her victimisation. The neologism embraces a duality that is at once abstract, yet concrete, for 'farligheten' represents to the twelve-year old Tora not only the condition of 'dangerousness' that exists like a climatic state, its threat permeating her immediate environment, but in more concrete terms, it denotes her abuser and the sexual abuse he inflicts upon her:

Hender. Hender som kom i mørket. Det var farligheten. Store, harde hender som krafset og klemte. [p. 6]

[Hands. Hands that came in the dark. That was the dangerousness. Large, hard hands that groped and squeezed.]

In this extract, Tora's abusive stepfather is represented by his hands, which occur as agents with verbs of action. In his discussion on the system of transitivity in language, Paul Simpson refers to Michael Halliday's analysis of William Golding's *The Inheritors*, indicating the significance of

'meronymic'¹⁷ (or 'body part') agency in the representation of a world seen through the eyes of a Neanderthal man. In Golding's novel, corporal fragmentation contributes to the unfamiliarity of events that are related from this particular character's perspective. In *Huset med den blinde glassveranda*, meronymic agency is a powerful linguistic device in the depiction of sexual abuse as experienced by the young Tora. The representation of Henrik by his body parts: fingers, hands, mouth, and other isolated aspects of his being: his voice, breath, laughter, presents Henrik as a grotesque, monstrous entity, a gothic-like villain typified by his inhumanity, his 'thing-ness', as referred to by David Punter in his analysis on *Jekyll and Hyde* in his volume *The Modern Gothic*.¹⁸

The deictic verb 'kom' (came) in the clause 'Hender som kom i mørket' indicates that the disembodied 'hands' are depicted from Tora's perspective; they are moving towards her, seemingly from nowhere. Implicit in the word 'mørket' (the dark) is Tora's tactile perception of her abuser, explicitly conveyed through the verbs 'krafset and klemte' (groped and squeezed), the alliterative velar *k* further emphasising the hardness and unrelenting brutality of the abusing 'hands'. The full import of this image becomes apparent a page later when we discover that Henrik has the use of only one arm, having been injured by the Germans during the war. To the abused Tora, this 'able' limb is infinitely more grotesque than Henrik's damaged arm:

Det underlige og skremmende med Henriks overkropp var likevel ikke den ødelagte skulderen. Det var den friske! [p. 12]

[The strange and frightening thing about Henrik's upper body wasn't, however, the destroyed shoulder. It was the good one!]

As Rakel Christina Granaas observes, the depiction of Henrik's crippled arm provides a rare insight into 'an otherwise one-dimensionally evil literary persona.'¹⁹ Øystein Rottem suggests that Henrik's abuse of Tora can be interpreted

as 'a perverted form of revenge.'²⁰ In his article on the melodramatic element in Wassmo's writing, Rottem illustrates the thematic complexity of the novel. Tora's stigma is twofold: the illegitimate child of a German father and Norwegian mother, conceived during the Nazi occupation of Norway, Tora is sexually victimised by her stepfather who is himself a victim, damaged by the war. The diametric interplay between aggression and passivity is exemplified in the contrast between Henrik's 'good' arm and his 'bad' arm:

Den veltet seg enormt under klærne. Neven og armen var en eneste bunt av trassige muskler i rastløs bevegelse. Men på venstre side hang hånden og armen underutviklet og passiv og var en hån mot hele Henriks vesen. [p. 12]

[It was huge, tossing around under his clothes. The fist and arm were a single knot of defiant muscles in restless motion. But on his left side the hand and the arm hung, underdeveloped and passive, an insult to Henrik's entire being.]

The definition between hand and arm is erased: the limb is shapeless, yet powerfully active, the suggestion of repressed violence implicit in the noun 'bunt' (knot) and the adjective 'trassig' (defiant). The opposition between impotence and force, passivity and aggression that is so powerfully expressed in the above extract, alludes not only to the conflicting characteristics of Henrik's limbs, but also to the extreme difference in the balance of power between the abuser and the abused.

Nowhere is this disparity in power relations more graphically illustrated than in the scene where Henrik rapes Tora. Significantly, it is on this occasion that Tora does not have time to 'abandon' her body:

En kveld kom knirket i døra så bratt at hun ikke fikk tid til å forlate kroppen sin og la tankene løpe fritt ut av vinduet. Tora var nødt til å følge med, kjenne alt som skjedde med henne. [p. 152]

[One evening the creak of the door came so suddenly that she didn't have time to leave her body and let her thoughts run freely out of the window. Tora was forced to follow what was happening, to feel everything that was happening to her.]

The process of disembodiment which normally creates some distance between the abuse inflicted on Tora and her involvement in that abuse, is thwarted by the suddenness of Henrik's entrance into her room. On this occasion, Tora is forced to 'feel' the violation of her body, to experience the full impact of Henrik's abuse of her. Her reaction is conveyed through the following description of her dehumanised state, the relentless and violent nature of the attack heightened through the alliterative velar *k* consonant:

Da tok hun til å jamre og klynke og krype rundt i sengen. Klarte ikke å ligge stille og bare la det komme til en ende denne kvelden også. [p. 152]

[Then she began to wail and whimper and crawl around in her bed. Couldn't manage to lie still and just let it come to an end this evening like the others.]

We can find in this extract a conspicuous signal that this incident is part of an ongoing pattern of sexual abuse. Implicit in the adverb 'også' (also) is the repetitive nature of Tora's sexual victimisation. Her pitiful and futile attempt at escaping from Henrik's violation of her, provokes his bewilderment and contempt:

Det forvirret ham, det pirret hatet hans. Det kunne brukes til å vekke attrå, til å bruke makt og kraft. [p. 152]

[It confused him, stimulated his hatred. It could be used to arouse desire, to use power and strength.]

Tora's resistance is an instrument which Henrik uses in order to justify his sexual abuse of her. Her weak struggle is concretised and intensified through the repetition of the neutral pronoun 'det' (it). The repetition of the verb 'bruke' (use), first in its

passive form, and then in its active usage, serves to contrast the vulnerability and powerlessness of the victim with the brutal domination of the abuser. But we are not confronted with an explicit description of the perpetrator. In the following depiction of Henrik's savage invasion of Tora's young body, the narration is focussed on the experience of the victim:

Myk, myk var motstanden. Bare til å sette tommelen i øyet på. Den ba for seg, og ga nok etter. Så revnet det. Tora kjente det et sted utenfor seg selv. Visste ikke hvor det begynte eller endte, det hang ikke fast med resten av henne. Likevel smertet det så. [p. 152]

[The resistance was soft, soft. Just enough to press the thumb into its eye. It begged for its life, and gave in. Then it tore. Tora felt it somewhere outside herself. Didn't know where it began or where it ended. It wasn't attached to the rest of her. Yet it hurt so.]

Alliteration and the fronting of the repeated adjective 'myk' (soft) lends a poetic quality to the language that is akin to a lullaby, highlighting the extreme youth and innocence of the rape victim. The fronting of the adjective 'myk' (soft) also serves to emphasise the physical vulnerability of Tora's immature body. The pain of her rape is beyond the limits of her experience and in her consciousness it is felt as something external to her physical self. The scene is reminiscent of Maya Angelou's rape in the first volume of her autobiography *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*:

Then there was the pain. A breaking and entering when even the senses are torn apart. The act of rape on an eight-year old body is a matter of the needle giving because the camel can't. The child gives, because the body can, and the mind of the violator cannot.²¹

Henrik's brutal and steadfast persistence in wielding his power over Tora culminates in his use of a rope with which to

ensnare her in her own bed to enable him to fully complete his violation of her:

Da kom han igjen. Med et rep. Tora trodde det ikke! Verden var ikke så grim. [p. 153]

[Then he came back. With a rope. Tora couldn't believe it! The world wasn't that cruel.]

Tora's entrapment is so unexpectedly violent and sudden that she is not given sufficient time to 'escape' from her body. It is perhaps her reaction to Henrik's abuse of her that exacerbates the violence he implements on this occasion, culminating in his rape of her. His effective employment of the rope as a weapon, an incremental implement in his violent entry of Tora, provides a sadly ironic contrast to the highly ineffectual function which Tora has hitherto assigned to the potentially dangerous knife as a means of preventing Henrik's entry into her room.

One night prior to the rape, Tora, in her desperation, takes her mother's meat knife into her bed to defend herself against Henrik. However it is not the knife, but the 'shield' of her first menstrual blood that protects her on this occasion:

Det skjoldet var trygt om det var spinkelt. Det hadde berget jentunger og kvinner før, uten at Tora visste det.

Ei størknet blod-rose. En mørkerød blomst i den blå gymnastikkbuxsa som hun selv hadde sydd på håndarbeidet. [p. 140]

[That shield was secure, even though it was fragile. It had saved young girls and women before, without Tora knowing it.

A solidified blood-rose. A dark red flower in the blue gym shorts she'd made herself in sewing class.]

The compact 'blood-rose' which symbolises Tora's initiation into womanhood, presents a stark contrast to the blood which permeates her sheet as she is raped:

Blodet kom helt uten at det skulle. Det var i mønster utover hele lakenet fordi hun ikke greide å holde seg på plass under ham. [p. 153]

[The blood came, although it wasn't supposed to. It was in patterns all over the entire sheet because she wasn't able to stay in place underneath him.]

The blood, which had recently served to protect her from her stepfather's violation of her, now flows freely as a result of his violation. Tora's bewilderment is signalled in the following exclamatory utterance:

Pusten og blodet! [p. 153]

[The breathing and the blood!]

The co-occurrence of 'pusten' and 'blodet' indicates Tora's realisation that this blood is intrinsic to 'farligheten': 'the dangerousness'.

Changes in the abuser's breathing is one of the features in a 'pattern' discovered by Ellen Klosterman in her research on representations of sexual abuse in writings by women, in both fictional and non-fictional works. This pattern includes, among many others, elements such as the perpetrator's manipulation of the victim's physical environment; a fixed reference point in time; justification by the perpetrator for inflicting the abuse, and a reference to the abuser's sexual arousal, which Klosterman describes as follows:

The perpetrator's sexual satisfaction is indicated by details such as changes in his breathing, intensity of his touch, or facial expression, or through details about his erection or ejaculation.²²

In *Huset med den blinde glassveranda*, Henrik's breathing is an element of farligheten. In the following extract, Tora distinguishes between Henrik's habitual mode of movement and the premeditated 'footsteps' that signal his depraved motivation:

Henrik beregnet verken dørkarm eller dør. Han hadde ikke skritt, han subbet bare inn. Men Henrik hadde andre skritt inni hus om han ville. Skritt som nesten ikke hørtes. Lydløse, men full av grov pust. [p. 6]

[Henrik didn't take into account either doors or doorframes. He didn't have footsteps, he just shambled in. But Henrik had other footsteps inside the house if he chose. Footsteps that could hardly be heard. Silent, but full of coarse breathing.]

When he forces his way into Tora's room when she is bathing herself, his breathing becomes the sole element of the scene of abuse:

Så ble det bare pust i rommet. Pusten var nattelyden i huset. [p. 53]

[Then there was only breathing in the room. Breathing was the night sound of the house.]

In this extract, the first occurrence of the noun 'pust' (breath) is without an article or possessive pronoun; it is an isolated entity, possessing no evident source. It is merely 'breath'. Through the adverb 'bare' (only), it becomes the sole occupier of the space and the essence of the moment immediately prior to violation. Like 'farligheten', it is represented as a quasi-climatic state: a condition of the house in which the abuse occurs. When it is repeated in the definite form, it is identifiable as something that is associated with the night, but which is now threatening Tora in the daylight hours. Her dawning realisation that 'the breathing' is no longer only a phenomenon of the night is not fully formulated, as indicated by aposiopesis:

Nå var det dag men... [p. 53]

[Now it was daytime but...]

Tora's ambivalence towards the converse conditions of daylight and darkness are expressed in the following

paradox, where her dilemma is symbolised by a tension between summer and winter, day and night:

Hun ville at det skulle være sommer og lyst hele døgnet når hun hadde det slikt. Samtidig ville hun gjemme seg i mørke vinteren i den mest bortgemte krå som kunne finnes. [p. 52]
[She wanted it to be summer and light the whole day and night when she felt like this. At the same time she wanted to hide in the dark winter in the most concealed corner that could be found.]

This extract exemplifies the novel's underlying themes of entrapment and escape. In the north of Norway, where the novel is set, summer and winter bring diametric and extreme conditions of light and dark. To the sexually victimised Tora, neither provides shelter from her abuser, for it is in the very house they both inhabit that the abuse occurs: *Huset med den blinde glassveranda*.

In an interview with Catherine Sandnes, Herbjørg Wassmo talks about 'the betrayed child' in her books:

Men når det er sagt, så er det åpenbart at det sviktede barnet går igjen som et ledemotiv i bøkene mine. Og det vil ikke forbause meg om det vil henge med meg gjennom enda noen tiår.²³

[But when it comes to it, then it is obvious that the betrayed child recurs as a leitmotif throughout my books. And it wouldn't surprise me if it sticks with me through another ten years.]

The theme of the betrayed child is powerfully examined in *Huset med den blinde glassveranda*, the novel's central metaphor of blindness reflecting the betrayal of the central character, the sexually abused Tora. At the beginning of this article, I quoted an extract from Roland Summit's article on the 'blindness' to child sexual abuse that is still prevalent in our society: our persistent neglect to recognise the true nature

and extent of the sexual exploitation of children. Theirs must surely be the ultimate betrayal.

Notes

1. Blair & Rita Justice, *The Broken Taboo* (London: Peter Owen, 1980), p.14.
2. Roland C. Summit, 'Hidden Victims, Hidden Pain', in G.E. Wyatt & G. Johnson Powell (eds.), *Lasting Effects of Child Sexual Abuse* (California: Sage Publications, 1988), p.40.
3. Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), p. 60.
4. Emily Driver, 'Introduction', in E. Driver & A. Droisen (eds.), *Child Sexual Abuse: Feminist Perspectives* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 2.
5. Ellen Bass & Louise Thornton (eds.), *I Never Told Anyone: Writings by Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* (New York: Harper, 1983), p. 24.
6. Ellen F. Klosterman, *The Music She Hears: Point of View and Technique in Women's Writing about Childhood Sexual Abuse* (dissertation in partial fulfilment of PhD, Microfiche edition) (Ohio: Bowling Green State University, 1997), p. 9.
7. *The House with the Blind Glass Windows*, translated by Roseann Lloyd & Allen Simpson (Washington: Seal Press, 1987).
8. Catherine Sandnes, 'Fornuft og følelser: Et intervju med Herbjørg Wassmo', in *Født av spindel og jern*, ed. Randi Christina C. Krogsveien (Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag, 2000), p.145.
9. Ellen Klosterman, op.cit., p. 136.
10. Jorunn Hareide, 'Kampen for menneskeverd', *Norsk Årbok*, 1982.
11. Ellen Klosterman, op. cit., p. 30.
12. Emily Driver & Audrey Droisen, op. cit., p.184.
13. In Peter Verdonk & Jean-Jacques Weber (eds.), *Twentieth Century Fiction: From Text to Context*. (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 149. Simpson and Montgomery go on to suggest that the proliferation of verbs of seeing and hearing in the novel *Cal* indicates that 'the narrative focalization...is unequivocally locked within Cal's consciousness.'
14. Rakel Christina Granaas, 'Den kroppen som ikke var hennes', in *Født av spindel og jern*, ed. Randi Christina C. Krogsveien (Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag, 2000), p. 21.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
16. *The House with the Blind Glass Windows*, p. 3.
17. Paul Simpson, *Language, Ideology and Point of View* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 110.
18. David Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, vol. 2: *The Modern Gothic* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 2.
19. Rakel Christina Granaas, op. cit., p. 17.

20. Øystein Rottem, 'Det tomme rommet', in *Født av spindel og jern*, ed. Randi Christina C. Krogsveien (Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag, 2000), p. 78.
21. Maya Angelou, *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* (London: Virago, 1984), p. 76.
22. Ellen Klosterman, op. cit., p. 192.
23. Catherine Sandnes, op. cit., p. 140.

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William Golding, *The Inheritors*.

Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (London: Vintage edition, 1999 (1970)).

Mary Kay Norseng, 'A Child's Liberation of Space: Herbjørg Wassmo's *Huset med den blinde glassveranda*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 1986, vol. 58.

Herbjørg Wassmo, *Huset med den blinde glassveranda* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1981).