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Narrating Motherhood: Identity Construction in Olga Ravn's Novel "Mit
Arbejde"

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Abstract

This bachelor thesis analyzes how maternal identity is constructed by means of narrative in Olga Ravn's novel "Mit Arbejde" (2020). By combining theoretical approaches of narratology and maternal theory, it explores how the narrative design of the novel represents a maternal crisis and how the maternal experiences and their reflections, as they emerge in the novel, relate to the theoretically established concept of the maternal journey. More specifically, the analysis is constructed after the model of such journey, which was developed by Megan Rogers (2017). Analyzing the novel by following Rogers' model revealed the deeply rooted social and psychological problems which affected the Mother's crisis as they stem from the problematic and false motherhood narrative created by the patriarchy. The narrative construction also employs only half of the model, which symbolizes the novel's refusal to fit into the narrative structure formed by phallogentric tradition. This stance represents rebellion against patriarchal ideology and the motherhood and writing models embedded in it.

Keywords: *Megan Rogers, Olga Ravn, maternal subjectivity, maternal narratology, identity construction, maternal ambivalence, maternal journey.*

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Introduction

“Is it through writing I become a mom?”¹

(*Olga Ravn, “Mit Arbejde”*)

Olga Ravn (b. 1986) is a Danish writer who works with a wide range of literature, from science fiction to poetry. She is also a founder of the alternative writers’ academy “Hekseskolen” (eng. Witch School), which focuses on feminist, ritualistic, and collective approaches to literary and writing processes (Bach). Ravn debuted in 2012 with the poetry collection “Jeg æder mig selv som en lyng”, which had great success and earned Ravn a place in the Danish literary canon. Later she released another poetry collection, “Den hvide rose” (2016), and two novels: “Celestine” (2015) and “De ansatte” (2018). The latter was shortlisted for the International Booker Prize in 2021. Her works tend to send the reader on a journey of self-reflection, and one of her latest novels “Mit Arbejde” (2020), is no exception. The book was under making for five years and underwent uncountable corrections, but Ravn was determined to release it (Karlebjerg). The author received a *Politikkens* literature prize for it the same year the novel was published.

“Mit Arbjede” (Eng. “My Work”) is a motherhood novel that belongs to the relatively new wave of motherhood literature, which in the Danish context is also represented by such works as Cecilie Lind’s “Mit Barn”, Maja Lucas’ “Mor”, Dy Plambeck’s “Til min søster”, and many others, which explore the topic of the problematic, “dark” side of motherhood, that tends to be kept hidden. Ravn’s novel follows the story of a first-time mom who suffers from post-partum depression and intense anxiety and whose life, worldview, and identity become misbalanced after the birth of her child. This event changed her life tremendously, and motherhood is nothing she expected and hoped for either. This forces her into a state of constant doubt, instability, and insecurity.

“Mit Arbejde” has personal significance for Olga Ravn. She herself is a mother and has revealed her motherhood experiences in multiple interviews, similar to those of the novel’s protagonist. She suffered from post-partum depression and experienced ambivalent feelings toward her child and a loss of identity (Lodberg). Despite that, Ravn claims that “Mit Arbejde” is not a story about her: “This book

¹ “Er det i skriften jeg bliver mor?” (Ravn, *Mit Arbejde*). This and further quotes from this novel are translated by the author of the thesis, as the official translation was published late in the thesis writing process (in May 2022).

is not about me nor my child's story, that he has not come into this world in happiness. It is about the experience of post-partum depression; *that* is what is important! It is insanely important to normalize.”² (ibid.)

The novel in its form is a collection of different modes of verbal language (letters, poems, memoir pieces, medical records, play scripts), which all were written within three years – beginning with the woman's pregnancy and ending when her child is a toddler, almost three years old. They were found and are being assembled some years later by the novel's first-person narrator, who also turns out to be a first-time mom trying to come to grips with her situation and state of mind. This thesis will reveal that these two narratological figures are very closely related, as they appear out of each other and then merge into one again. In this sense, the act of writing and construction of the novel are the acts in which a disturbed woman's thoughts, crises, and feelings unravel and attempt to fall into place, hopefully providing her some peace of mind, reconciliation, and, in some extent, confidence in herself.

Because of the way this novel is constructed and the issues that are central in this novel, this thesis argues that Olga Ravn's "Mit Arbejde" is a work that can be read as a story of maternal identity (self)construction. This thesis is grounded in the analysis of the text, which aims at exploring the following questions:

1. How does the narrative design of the novel represent maternal crisis?
2. How do the maternal experiences and their reflection correlate with the theoretically established, narratological model of the maternal journey?

² "Bogen handler ikke om mig og om mit barns historie, at han ikke er kommet til verden i lykke. Den handler om den fødselsdepressive erfaring, dét er det vigtige! Det er sindssygt vigtigt at normalisere" (Lodberg).

Overview of previous research

Since the novel was released not too long ago, there are few literary analyses of it. Despite that, “Mit Arbejde” appears in a couple of master theses as a part of their empirical material and a short article in “Passage” – a Danish journal for literature and critique. All of these analyses look at the novel from different perspectives. This chapter will present the key findings of the two master theses and the article from “Passage”.

The first one is a master thesis “Moderskabets kropslige tilstande” (Eng. “Motherhood’s bodily states”) by Stine Thorsen. In this thesis, “Mit Arbejde” is one of the four contemporary Danish motherhood novels which the thesis deals with and approaches from the perspective of bodily experiences (Thorsen 1). For this reason, only a certain part of the novel is used in the analysis – a series of 21 poems, found at the beginning of the book (ibid. 50). These poems, according to Thorsen, are the most representative of the complex relationship the protagonist has with her body after childbirth (ibid.). The most prominent theme is breastfeeding - the clearest sign of the body working independently of her will and understanding (ibid. 51). This bodily process makes the protagonist feel isolated from her body since she has partially lost control over it. On top of that, this leads to complex feelings towards the child since their connection appears to be more bodily than emotional (ibid. 52). It also causes conflicts in her relationship with the child’s father, as the biological processes of being a mom stand in the way of equally sharing the tasks of taking care of the child between the partners (ibid. 53).

The second one is also a master thesis – “Det jeg burde være og det er jeg” (Eng. “What I ought to have been and that I am”) by Trine Majland Brohus. This thesis analyses “Mit Arbejde” alongside Tove Ditvelsen’s novel “Gift” by looking at the depiction of “the whole person” (Dan. “det hele menneske”) in these literary works (Brohus 58). The analysis focuses on the depiction of “the biological body” and “the social body” in the texts and how the characters’ bodily states affect their emotional life (ibid.). In this part, the analysis provides similar insights to the ones presented in the thesis discussed in the previous paragraph – it points out the way the protagonist is subject to her body and feels like she has no control over it. At the same time, it also controls her mental state (ibid. 21). In this sense, the analysis also looks at the characters’ psychological state and its connection to their bodily experiences. Brohus concludes that the character’s physical condition and mental state are connected because they affect and control each other (ibid. 36). The analysis also reveals how the

protagonist copes with this state of mental and bodily insecurity by chasing after “the normal life”, which indicates the ideal life that seems unreachable for Anna due to her struggles (ibid. 40). Writing becomes another way of coping while also evoking ambivalent feelings. Self-expression through writing makes her feel whole while also pointing out the reality of her troubled state as she is having trouble expressing her feelings and thoughts (ibid. 46).

In the third study, Iben Engelhardt Andersen’s article “Alt var blod og intet var lykke. Fødselshorror og evig vedligeholdelse i Olga Ravns *Mit arbejde*” (Eng. “All was blood and nothing was happiness. Horrors of giving birth and eternal care/maintenance in Olga Ravn’s “My Work”) shortly discusses various topics and problems represented in the novel. Firstly, it discusses the novel’s title and its reference to the hard maternal work, which creates capitalistic value but is not acknowledged in the general economy (Andersen 119). Then it discusses how the novel is formed, its complicated relationship with time, and focuses on the domestic space within which the motherhood experiences unfold (ibid. 120). The article also touches upon the different ways Anna and Aksel understand parenthood, as Aksel views it as a series of chores that can be shared among them (ibid. 121). This leads to insights into the patriarchy and its effect on the motherhood narrative. At the same time, the article points out how “Mit Arbejde” aims to shrink the distance between the narrative and the reality of motherhood and challenge the embedded misleading norms (ibid.).

This bachelor thesis approaches Ravn’s novel from a different angle regarding these works. Despite some of the topics mentioned in these works being present in this analysis as well (the relationship between motherhood and writing, the mother’s relationship with her partner, and patriarchal impact on the motherhood narrative), this thesis’ focus is on the construction of the narrative and maternal identity, which provides a different perspective on this novel.

Theory overview

1. Narratology - Identity and narration

The relationship between narratology and identity is a vast subject, which may contain different variations and interpretations. The article by Michael Bamberg in *the living handbook of narratology*, which is quoted in this paragraph, captures the broadness of this concept. It involves insights into identity in both spoken and written narration, the history of the study of identity and narration, and the different approaches to the topic. For clarity and relevance, this paragraph will only be overviewing insights about narration as a tool for positioning oneself as a character and how it affects the process of identity construction in narration.

In narratology, narrating as a speech activity can be understood as a “privileged genre for identity construction because it requires situating characters in time and space through gesture, posture, facial cues, and gaze in coordination of speech” (Bamberg, para. 3). It can be used as a tool for the writing self to position themselves as characters in the text, look at themselves from afar, and take a reflective position vis-à-vis self as a character. This helps in the process of identity construction, although identity itself is a rather unfixed term since identity is constantly fluid and ever-changing.

The claim of identity faces three dilemmas: 1) sameness of a sense of self over time in the face of constant change; 2) uniqueness of the individual vis-à-vis others faced with being the same as everyone else; and 3) the construction of agency as constituted by self (with a self-to-world direction of fit) and the world (with a world-to-self direction of fit) (ibid. para. 2). Taking such a reflective position on self as a character has been elaborated in the narratological differentiation between author, narrator, and character. This process takes place in the present while referring to the past, making past events relevant for the act of telling, pointing toward the meaningfulness of relationships and worthwhile lives (ibid. para. 4). The problem of narrative’s connection with identity is that limiting narratives to what they are about restricts identity to the referential or cognitive level of speech activities and disregards real life, where identities are constantly developing, under construction, and changed over time. It is thus important to realize that the identity of the narrating subject is not confined by just one societal discourse but is open to change. It can adapt, change, and transform when faced with various challenges (ibid. para. 6).

In the process of becoming individualized in narration, it is essential to emphasize the narratological distinction between “narrating self” (“I” as speaker/agent) and “narrated self” (“me” as character/actor) and between the narrator and the protagonist (ibid. para. 11). The act of depicting oneself as a character creates a basis for self-related actions such as self-disclosure, self-reflection, and self-criticism, potentially leading to self-control, self-constraint, and self-discipline (ibid.).

Another critical insight on the topic is the analogy between life and story – the ability to see life *as* storied (ibid. para. 13). It is known that lives tend to be told by depicting characters and how they develop. This development rests on an internal and external form of organization, and these two aspects both play an important role in constructing the protagonist’s identity. Moreover, this interplay of human (and humane) interiority and culturally available models of continuity (plots) gives the narrative a powerful role in the process of seeing life as a narrative (ibid.). According to McAdams, life stories are more than recapitulations of past events. They also have a defining character: “our narrative identities are the stories we live by” (McAdams, qtd. in Bamberg, para. 15).

2. Maternal theory

Motherhood studies is a relatively new field of research. Andrea O’Reilly only coined the term “maternal studies” in 2006. However, the very beginning of this field of scholarly inquiry dates back to 1976 – the year Adrienne Rich’s landmark of this field, “Of Woman Born” was published (O’Reilly, *Encyclopedia of Motherhood* vii). According to O’Reilly, it is “the first and arguably still the best feminist book on mothering and motherhood”, which has “influenced the way a whole generation of scholars thinks about motherhood (O’Reilly, *From Motherhood to Mothering* 2). Since then, many academic disciplines, from anthropology to women’s studies, have been engaged in some type of motherhood research. In the 2000s, the topic of motherhood emerged as a distinct and established field of research (O’Reilly, *Encyclopedia of Motherhood* vii). As a result, motherhood studies are interdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary, and multidisciplinary while also remaining an autonomous and independent scholarly discipline, focusing on the oppressive and empowering dimensions of mothering and the complex relationship between the two (ibid. vii-viii). In the following overview of maternal theory, some of the theoretical concepts of the field which are relevant to the analysis and which allow building a theoretical background for it will be presented.

2.1 Maternal ambivalence and “the good mother”

Maternal ambivalence is described as a “coexistence of love and hatred” toward their child (Brown 122). In maternal theory, maternal ambivalence is one of the most discussed topics. That is because ambivalent feelings in motherhood tend to be left unacknowledged, though when they are, maternal ambivalence is considered deviant or problematic in the common motherhood discourse (ibid. 121). In her article, Brown argues that such a position toward ambivalence is harmful to mothers. It might be one of the main reasons why so many modern-day mothers experience a crisis in their motherhood. The expectations of only feeling love and happiness in motherhood derive from the discourse mentioned above. Because of it, they burden the mothers with additional anxiety and worry about being a “good enough mother”. Thus, it might result in issues such as self-torment and depression (Parker, qtd. in Brown, 122). According to Brown, ambivalence can be best understood by looking at its psychological and social components, i.e., Brown argues that maternal ambivalence is produced socially and culturally, and it is shaped by the circumstances that define women’s lives (Brown 123). It is important to mention that motherhood memoirs and the theme of ambivalence became prominent in the 1970s with the works of such writers like Adrienne Rich. The theme of these works tended to be the lack of happiness in motherhood and childcare. These writers saw this negative side of mothering as rooted in a patriarchal society’s conditions. From this stems Rich’s differentiation between *mothering* as an experience and practice and *motherhood* as a socially and culturally formed institution. This distinction remains the basis of most of today’s maternal theory and research (O’Reilly, qtd. in Brown 125).

Sarah LaChance Adams delves deeper into maternal ambivalence and analyzes why ambivalent feelings in motherhood occur. Adams distinguishes two contrary attitudes in motherhood: *mutuality* and *conflict* (Adams). The first one mostly has to do with the physical connection between the mother and the child. They become intertwined during pregnancy and breastfeeding, and sometimes this connection does not disappear for years, even when the physical connection between the mother and the child is seemingly gone (ibid.). This results in mothers forgetting themselves and yielding to the child’s needs (ibid.). The second one – conflict - mainly stems from mutuality, as the mother eventually begins longing for independence and mourning her maiden-self. Pregnancy and breastfeeding exhaust the mother’s body, making her feel like a hostage of the

child, which brings immense misery (ibid.). Studies show that pregnancy and new motherhood are risk factors for depression, resulting in 5-25% of new mothers suffering from post-partum depression (ibid.). Adams calls the coexistence between these attitudes “ambiguous intersubjectivity” (ibid.). According to her, acknowledging the contradicting feelings which arise in motherhood allows mothers to shift their focus from trying to be the perfect mother to discovering her relationship with her child with all the complex feelings that come with it, without guilt (ibid.)

Nonetheless, the stigma around maternal ambivalence keeps on growing – “new momism” is a term coined by Douglas and Michaels in 2004. It refers to “a set of ideals, norms and practices, most frequently and powerfully presented in the media, that seem on the surface to celebrate motherhood but which in reality promulgate standards of perfection that are beyond reach” (Douglas and Michaels, qtd. in Brown 132). The concept describes how a modern-day mother is expected to put the child’s needs ahead of her own, abandoning her identity. It feeds into the idea and the issue of maternal instinct – the “new momism” supports the belief that no woman can ever feel fulfilled if she does not have kids. In this case, self-sacrifice is mandatory since the child is supposed to be a woman’s primary concern (ibid). This belief seems to prosper among the mothers themselves, and therefore the ambivalent feelings and longing for individuality and time alone are highly frowned upon. The mothers who believe that children *have* to become the only important thing in a mom’s life tend to be very judgmental towards moms who see motherhood differently. The truth is that having ambivalent feelings during motherhood is entirely normal since raising a child is hard work, and not all parts of it are enjoyable (ibid 135). Maternal scholars claim that the existing narrative of motherhood equaling only happiness should be rewritten - in the word’s literal meaning. Openly writing about the realistic experiences of motherhood has the power to change the status quo by breaking the silence about maternal ambivalence and making it a part of the motherhood experience and thus making it more manageable for other mothers (Hewett and Parker, qtd. in Brown 135). Monika Bokiniiec seconds Brown on this aspect, claiming that “the personal nature of these narratives provides a way out of the institutionalized expert culture which is shaped to fit the male-oriented culture” (Bokiniiec, 160). In this sense, writing about real motherhood experiences creates a space for expressing ambivalence within the motherhood discourse and allows other mothers frame their motherhood identity and ambivalence within this space (Brown 136).

2.2 Maternal subjectivity

The notion of maternal subjectivity has arisen partly from critical reaction to and partly as an extension of the psychoanalytic tradition. Simply and abstractly put, maternal subjectivity is about shifting the gaze from motherhood as a state in which the mother is available to serve her child's needs to the significance of maternity to the mother herself (Stone). This concept partially stems from feminine subjectivity – the earlier feminist concept which focuses on creating the woman's subjectivity since women historically tended to be considered objects – the man's other, a deviation (ibid.). However, as much as works and discussions on such ideas are significant in feminist history, the original theory of feminine subjectivity leaves mothers in the background. According to Lisa Baraitser, there is a need to “repeat the second-wave move to uncouple the maternity and femininity <...> not this time for the sake of the feminine, but for the sake of the maternal” (Baraitser, qtd. in Stone). In her work, Baraitser identifies four main elements of mother-child relationships which impact a mother's subjectivity. The first one is *alterity* – a mother is responsible for a child, a whole other person, who is irregular, unpredictable, often mysterious, and who lives in their own time out of symmetry with the mother, oriented towards their own future. Despite recognizing this distinction between herself and a child, this, in a way, unequal relationship changes the mother. She discovers herself anew as the new maternal identity seems strange from the perspective of the prematernal self (Stone). The second one is *interruption*. The mother constantly lives in a state of being interrupted by her child, which according to Baraitser, creates micro-breaches in the mother's durational experiences since she does not have a choice but to answer to these interruptions (ibid.). The third element is *love* – the mother feels love towards her child. Through that, she realizes that now there are two centers of gravity and experience, i. e. she looks at the world from the point of view that there are two radically disjunct experiences, her own and her child's (ibid.). The last one is *encumbrance* – it has to do with the way the mother's heightened sensory awareness persists years after the birth of her child. She is more aware of her surroundings and the dangers they pose. The mother also notices her slowed-down movement, which is due to the child. She is forced to navigate a world of largely parent-unfriendly places and things, which she is hyper-aware of (ibid.). Baraitser's analyses focus on the strangeness of the mother's experience and how the “mother's antecedent ways of making things intelligible are challenged, stretched, troubled, and sometimes undone by the arrival and presence of a child” (ibid.).

Stone's account of maternal subjectivity builds on Baraitser's work, and the psychoanalytical approach discussed earlier in this paragraph. Stone argues that maternal subjectivity is structured by the mother's negotiation between her current relationship with her child and her past relationship with her own mother. The two merge as the mother identifies her own former child self with her child to be able to empathize with her child's needs while also identifying with her mother by remembering how she had cared for her when she was a child. It conditions the awakening of the mother's complex cluster of memories, feelings, and fantasies about her mother (Stone). Additionally, the mother eventually has to let the child go, and as she does so, she goes through the journey of separating from her mother again. The triangular structure of maternal subjectivity awakens many strong feelings and emotional memories in mothers, which affects them on top of the social expectations that it is not normal for mothers to have ambivalent feelings, which were discussed in the previous paragraph. Maternal subjectivity thus is one more layer of helping understand the emotional challenges of maternal experiences (ibid.).

Stone, however, points out the flaws of psychoanalytic traditions while also acknowledging their importance as the foundation of this study. Psychoanalysis tends to objectify the mother by only considering her from the child's viewpoint and only as someone who has an impact on the child and not vice versa. Maternal subjectivity approaches the mother as "a centre of subjective experience in her own right, where her relationship with her child has personal, emotional, and developmental meaning for her" (ibid.). Becoming a mother is an immense psychological transition, during which the mother has to completely reorganize her internal map of where she fits among other people in her life, relocate herself from being her parents' daughter to understanding herself as a parent figure now (ibid.).

2.3 Aesthetics of interruption

This concept builds on Baraitser's work as well, although it focuses mainly on the second element of maternal experience, concerning maternal subjectivity – *interruption*. Moynagh Sullivan interprets and expands on this notion by examining how maternal presence can interrupt aesthetic practice (Sullivan 107). She quotes Rich's elaboration of the maternal aesthetic of discontinuity by which Rich resists the DeBeauvoirian and Woolfian identification of motherhood as the enemy of independent creativity and thus affirming writing not from a *room* of her own but from a perspective of

the mother of children, barely able to have an uninterrupted *thought* of her own (ibid.). This quote from Rich exemplifies the way motherhood affects aesthetic practice and embodies the complicated relationship between motherhood and writing:

“In the late fifties I was able to write, for the first time, directly about experiencing myself as a woman. The poem was jotted in fragments during children’s naps, brief hours in the library, or at 3.00 A.M. after rising with a wakeful child. I despaired of doing any continuous work at this time. Yet I began to feel that my fragments and scraps had a common consciousness and a common theme, one which I would have been very unwilling to put on paper at an earlier time because I had been taught that poetry should be “universal,” which meant of course, nonfemale” (Rich, qtd. in Sullivan 107).

3. Maternal narratology

Although I have been so far presenting narratology and motherhood studies as separate theoretical fields, they have been already paired by Megan Rogers, which resulted in coining a new concept – *maternal narratology*. This chapter presents Rogers’ take on the concept and how this theoretical approach can be useful in analyzing maternal texts.

The history of the relationship between feminism and narratology is rather complicated. That is due to the fact that narratology has long been associated with structuralism and has thus “often been criticized for being a product of and reinforcing the patriarchal status quo” (Rogers, “The Maternal Journey”). For this reason, feminist narratology has taken a more rebellious approach and is historically known for rupturing previous narratological frameworks. Megan Rogers, however, argues that new approaches to narratology must transcend the belief that “structure is somehow inherently patriarchal and must make use of postclassical rather than poststructuralist narratological theory”, by also taking it a step further and suggesting a symbiotic interconnection between maternal theory and narratology (ibid.).

Roger revisits the figure of *the madwoman in the attic*, which in feminist literary criticism was embraced as an embodied figure of feminist rebellion and originated in the eponymous seminal book by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979) (ibid.). In her work, Rogers suggests a definition for the

twentieth and twenty-first-century literary madwoman: “A female protagonist, created by a female author, and interpreted by feminist literary criticism as a rebellious trope whose circumstances cause a breakdown that is about the literal or figurative confinement, or even death, of the self” (Rogers, *Finding the Plot*). According to her, the madwoman structurally and narratologically disrupts the narrative structure, creating a need for a new framework required to read the texts (Rogers, “The Maternal Journey”). Rogers has noticed that there is a specific pattern defining the character’s journey in the works containing the literary madwoman figure (ibid.)

Rogers builds the scheme of the maternal journey on the scheme of the eternal madwoman’s journey, which she also expands and elaborates, as it originally stems from Maureen Murdock’s model of the heroine’s journey (ibid.). Traditionally, the structure of the madwoman’s journey traps the protagonist in psychological descent as well as in the private sphere, which results in “prevailing ideologies of femininity as the sphere of otherness, of antireason, and anticulture, which continue to exercise of powerful influence” (Felski, qtd. in Rogers, “The Maternal Journey”). However, Rogers argues that by determining a literary practice (encompassing reading, writing, and critical analysis) that can release the eternal madwoman from the descent to the goddess stage of the heroine’s journey, it would become possible to understand how the transformation of the ideologies of gender (rather than just resistance to them) can take place and how the symbolic resolution of the madwoman in fictional texts can contribute to such transformation (ibid.). Rogers builds this model by analyzing such works as “*Surfacing*” by Margaret Atwood, “*The Bell Jar*” by Sylvia Plath, “*The Woman Upstairs*” by Claire Messud, and “*Wide Sargasso Sea*” by Jean Rhys.

Maternal agency is an important notion for this narratological approach, which Rogers defines as “an individual’s capacity for self-determination realized through actions of any and all people who grant legitimacy to one’s feelings, refuse the role of victim, and are guided by an orientation to care for self and others in a way that empowers” (ibid.). In the maternal journey, there must be a point where the mother is met with, as Rogers has called it, the Demeter decision, which motivates her to take on the maternal agency. By enacting it, the eternal madwoman gains the ability to unlock the doors of her narrative captivity (“the attic”), cease being an oppressed victim of the patriarchal hegemony, and take the necessary step towards becoming a self-realized, self-loving, and self-respecting subject (ibid.). After this, a feminist narrative becomes possible, although it requires four steps:

1. *Finding the maternal mentor* – finding a figure to help understand, and accept the protagonist’s new identity and role within society;
2. *Acknowledging the shadow* – the protagonist must acknowledge and accept her darkness, the shadow;
3. *Recognizing and withdrawing projections* - The protagonist must take back consciously what she originally cast out and accept responsibility for her own inner turmoil;
4. *Integrating private and public spheres* – the protagonist must integrate the elements of her private and public life so that both halves are as important and respected.

These insights helped Rogers map out the model of the maternal journey with which she aims to “participate in a dialogue on reconceptualizing the dominant notions of madness and maternity within society and to engage in feminist discourse by suggesting new ways not only to theorize and write maternity but also to theorize, read, and write stories” (ibid.).

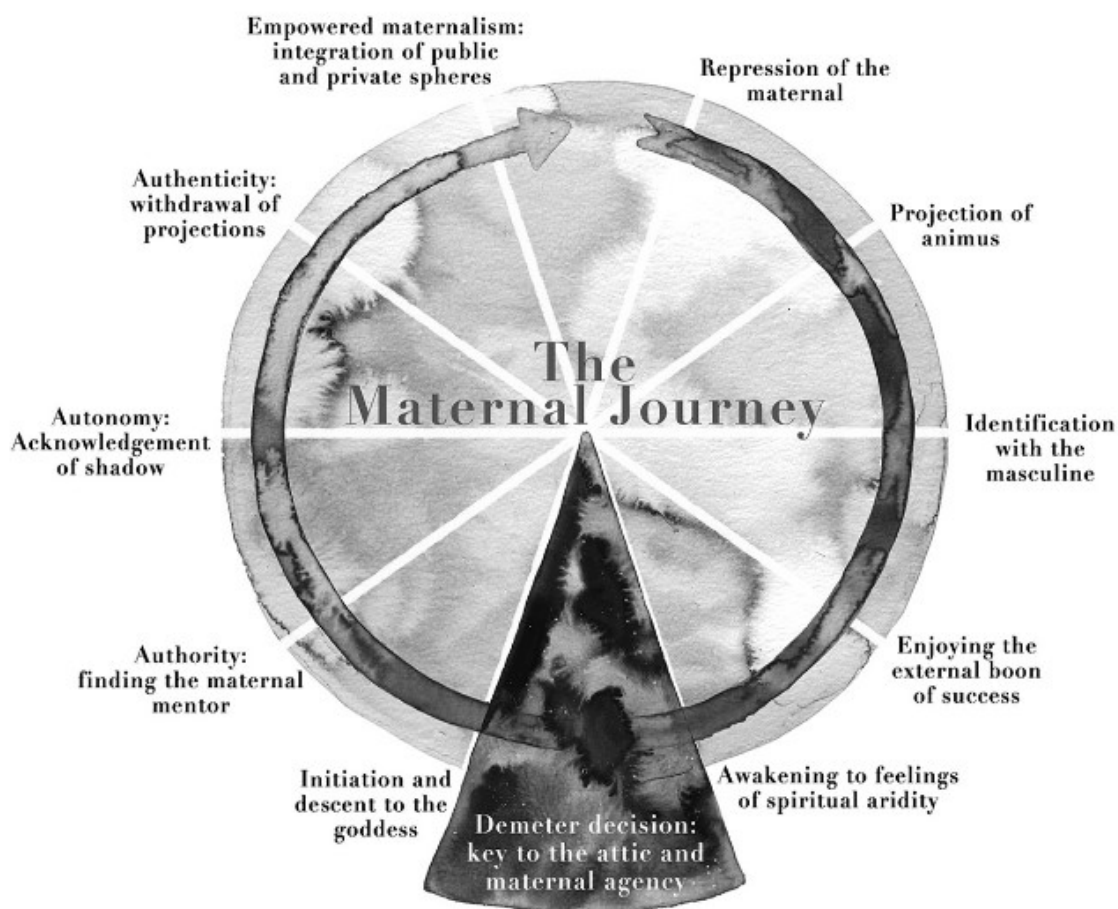


Figure 2: The maternal journey

Analysis

1. Disentangling the narrative layers

In “Mit Arbejde”, certain narratological tools are used, which function within the maternal discourse. They are essential for the comprehension of the novel, thus making the exploration of these narratological elements an inseparable part of the analysis. However, the narratological structure of “Mit Arbejde” is quite complicated, which is why there is a need to untangle the intertwined elements and make particular distinctions to continue and accomplish a successful analysis. This chapter will look more closely into the two most essential elements of narration: the narrating agency and its overall relation to the text structure.

1.1 Protagonist, narrator

From the very first pages of “Mit Arbejde”, it becomes evident that the narration of the novel is far from simple and requires critical reading in order for the reader to be able to interpret the story. There are two figures of the narrator – a double narrator, in a sense. Each of these figures plays a different role in the text. However, they also share the common “destiny”: they seem to be working through similar experiences of “depressive” mothering, and both partake in constructing and completing this very novel. In this paragraph, I will try to break down the layers of this complicated narrative design and explore how these narrator figures function in the text as well as in relation to each other, how they form an image of mothering with depression, and how this defines the “protagonist versus narrator” distinction, which will be helpful in further analysis.

The protagonist of the novel is called Anna. She is a mother whose perception of the world and her own identity fundamentally shifted once she became pregnant. This state of her, full of painful experiences, lasted until the third year after childbirth. We know this because the novel mainly consists of her notes written in this period of her life, which are found in a closet sometime later. These notes reveal the crises the protagonist had during this period. However, although, technically speaking, Anna could be considered to be the narrator of these very episodes, she does not seem to be telling the story of her experiences herself, at least not for most of the novel. It is the *narrator* of the higher diegetic level or the framing narrator (that I will subsequently simply call *the narrator*) who tells Anna’s story in her stead, in third person. To make matters even more complicated, Anna, in fact, does not exist. She

is a fictional character created by the narrator whose story the novel is actually telling. In other words, Anna is a sort of an alter ego, a medium created by the narrator to tell her own story and experiences through. According to the narrator, Anna came into being either during or right after childbirth, which was an intensely traumatizing experience for the narrator: “I bled away, I disappeared. I named this disappearance Anna”³ (Ravn, ch. “Dag Syv, 20.”). In this sense, Anna is initially a product of trauma, an object on which one can transfer one’s painful experiences, as these are too heavy to bear and too painful to live with. Anna also embodies the narrator’s lost identity, her life before she had a child. In a narratological sense, the narrator positions herself as a character in the narrative and even goes so far as to give the character another name to create the biggest possible distance between them. In this sense, the narration is autodiegetic, but it is realized via two narrating figures. The narrator shares her story in first-person narration as well as through Anna’s character, which is a projection of the narrator’s experience. By creating Anna and placing her in the narrative, the narrator creates a possibility to relive the painfully transformative years of her life by taking the observer’s position, which becomes a means of self-reflection and even self-construction.

The narrator herself is an important layer in untangling the narration of “Mit Arbejde”; therefore, it is necessary to expand on this figure of narration. All of this information about finding Anna’s notes, Anna being fictional and the narrator being the one whose story the novel tells, is told by the narrator. This means that the narrator tells some parts of the novel in first person, shifting the perspective, reminding the reader who is the one behind the text and writing this book. In a way, it is a voice from the future since the events and experiences, narrated in third person and presented as Anna’s, are from the past. However, this distinction of narration (third-person narration – Anna narrated by narrator, first-person narration – the narrator’s voice) is not absolute, mainly because the first-person narration makes it difficult to distinguish the voice behind the “I”. It could be the narrator, or it could also be Anna, who is given a voice instead of the narrator telling the story for her in the third person. This lack of clarity is due to the fragmentation of the novel. The different modes of verbal language, fragmentation, and the absence of chronology in the novel, make the comprehension and understanding of the narration rather difficult. However, it does not affect the comprehension of the text itself, since for the reader Anna and the narrator merge into one, into a First-time Mother (subsequently called Mother in the present analysis) who is trying to come to terms with her mothering

³ “Jeg blødte bort, jeg forsvandt. Jeg kaldte denne forsvinden for Anna.” (Ravn, ch. “Dag Syv, 20.”)

experiences by telling about them. Nevertheless, this does not erase the fact that this aforementioned narratological split exists for a reason and is meant to play a certain role in the storytelling and the novel as a whole.

In terms of narration, some parts of the book are clear to be told by a distinct narrator, leaving nearly no questions about the perspective of the storytelling. For example, it is most of the text parts in which the narrator tells Anna's story in third person, which takes up the majority of the book. Another one is the narrator's letters written to Anna, inserted in the novel every now and then, which are meant to update Anna on the novel construction process. The narrator speaks in first person and acknowledges Anna as another person in these letters. However, this is where the clarity ends. The ambiguity of the narrator first arises in the poems, which are also a big part of the novel. It remains unclear how the lyrical subject in these poems should be interpreted. I would argue that the lyrical "I" is most likely Anna since the narrator made it clear that this book is a collection of Anna's notes, but it is impossible to be sure. As mentioned before, the novel also contains text pieces by the narrator. Therefore, it is not impossible for the poems, or some of them, to belong to the narrator as well. I will look deeper into text construction and how the discussed layers of narration play a role in the process of identity construction in the following paragraphs.

1.2 The (in)coherent text

As mentioned before, the novel is a collection of various pieces of text, which the narrator calls "Anna's notes". These texts are of many different genres, meaning that the book consists of poems, prose pieces, letters, medical records, play scripts, and diary entries. All of them are from the period of Anna's pregnancy and her early motherhood, as well as text pieces by the narrator, which are inserted in between Anna's notes during the process of constructing this book. In this paragraph, I will look closer at how the novel's form represents the narrator's and Anna's mothering experience, the crises of this mothering, and how the novel's form is a metaphor for pregnancy and childbirth in terms of identity construction.

The fragmentation of the novel's text and the seeming incoherence among the different parts plays a symbolic role in the novel. It represents and reflects the reality of the mothering as experienced by the narrator. This is why the text is so diverse and constantly shifting – it embraces the diversity of

maternal experience, especially creating space for the ambivalent feelings. The coexistence of contradicting feelings is the reality of mothering, and the mother's job is to make them work together, just like the notes that were sewn together in order to complete this novel. To quote the narrator: "I must accept that this book is most likely never going to be well-shaped. Just like I must accept that my parenting is going to be full of mistakes, already is"⁴ (Ravn, ch. "Dag Tre, 9.").

The way the novel's form represents mothering can also be looked at through the lens of Sullivan's notion of *aesthetics of interruption*. The different pieces of text are never longer than seven pages; most of them only take up one or two pages, and some entries are only one line (mainly in the diary sections). This discontinuity and inability to construct a longer text represents the reality of a mother. She is constantly being interrupted, leaving a minimal amount of space for herself and writing. It results in the mother writing fragmented texts, which she managed to write down in smug. Poems, therefore, become a prominent and preferred genre among many mother writers due to their concentration of content in a relatively small amount of text. In this novel, the narrator and Anna are no exceptions – poems take up a big part of the book, and I would also argue them to be one of the most expressive texts in "Mit Arbejde". Despite the novel lacking chronological order, the poems are the first texts that come after the first description of the protagonist's childbirth. Already in these poems, there are traces of *maternal ambivalence*: "to love that infant/that brings me no joy"⁵ (Ravn, ch. "Sjette Begyndelse").

It is also important to mention the texts that differ from the others in terms of narration. In the previous paragraph, the duality of the narration has been distinguished – there is the protagonist and the narrator. However, the novel contains a few pieces of text that seem to have no conventional narration at all, such as medical records and play scripts. The first one provides either only the technicalities of the Mother's stay at the hospital hour by hour or the description and recommendation notes regarding the Mother written by the doctors. The play scripts have no narration either, and they only focus on the action and the act of speaking. Neither of them has a specific voice, and they do not provide any perspective, only basic information. One way to interpret the choice to include these types of texts in the book could be the aim to strip these scenarios of emotional impact, to distance them from oneself as much as possible, almost disowning them. The scenarios represented in such a way in the novel are

⁴ "Jeg må acceptere, at denne bog med stor sandsynlighed ikke bliver *velformet*. Ligesom jeg må acceptere, at mit forældreskab også kommer til at blive fuld af fejl, allerede er det" (Ravn, ch. "Dag Tre, 9.").

⁵ "at elske det spæde barn/ det bringer mig ingen glæde" (Ravn, ch. "Sjette Begyndelse").

childbirth, recommendations and test results from the psychiatry after the protagonist started suffering from post-partum depression and anxiety, and group therapy sessions. For the narrator, these are emotional and sensitive recollections, which are most likely too painful to revisit neither as herself nor as Anna.

The one type of text that remains more or less persistent throughout the novel and seems to tie the whole book together is the letters that the narrator writes to Anna during the novel's construction process. In those letters, the narrator addresses Anna as the actual author of this book and expresses doubts about whether she can comprehend what Anna was going through and what she aimed to express with her writing. Parallel to that, the narrator provides updates about her own pregnancy, revealing that she is pregnant for the second time. The updates are about the child's health and development. The further in the novel, the more her pregnancy progresses until she goes into labor, and the book reaches its end. These letters draw a parallel between pregnancy and childbirth and the construction of the text, giving it a metaphorical meaning.

2. The maternal journey – becoming a subject

The structure of the further analysis of the novel is based on Rogers' narratological model of the maternal journey. It is important to note that the stages provided by Rogers seem to be most applicable to a more traditional type of narrative, following a female protagonist's journey. Since "Mit Arbejde" has a somewhat subversive and unconventional narrative structure, I will try to interpret Rogers' model by focusing on the general main ideas of the stages of the scheme and applying them to the maternal journey, which the protagonist of "Mit Arbejde" is making her way through, but which, due to the novel's intricate narrative design, discussed previously, appears also to stand for the narrator's maternal journey and even for its more universalized idea that the novel as a whole represents. In a general sense, the subject of this journey is a rather ambiguous mother-figure (Mother), in which both of the narrative figures fit since they can, after all, be seen as two projections of one person. Moreover, I will focus more on the second crescent of the scheme - "the ascent". That is because this thesis aims to analyze how the mother-figure of "Mit Arbejde" aims for and travels towards subjectivity and identity after experiencing a crisis.

2.1 *The first crescent – the descent*

According to the model, the first half of the maternal journey in this novel is nearly identical to the heroine's journey, which, traditionally, ends there. It is a descent, halting at the bottom of the scheme, where the heroine reaches madness – becomes “the madwoman in the attic”. Here it is important to remember the time of the novel and what period of the protagonist's life the book depicts. It starts when the protagonist becomes pregnant, already in crisis. This means that the journey of this novel starts at the bottom of the model, jumping over the entirety of the first crescent. It is only through a means of speculation that it is possible to work out how the parts of the descent appeared in the time prior to pregnancy and what initiated the crisis. Some of Anna's notes provide a glimpse of her past, but it does not appear to be enough to gather the complete circle-shaped scheme of the maternal journey. Despite that, I believe it is possible to find some reasons for the protagonist's maternal crisis based on Rogers' maternal journey model.

I would argue that the *identification with the masculine* part (the second one) could be seen as the most influential in the Mother's crisis and the only one the text allows to get a glimpse of and interpret. Although, as mentioned before, it is not exactly a part of the narrative, I would interpret this part to be represented in the novel as the internalization of motherhood as an institution, which is a product of patriarchy. In the novel, Anna recalls and reflects on how she was conditioned to motherhood ever since she was a child: “There were thousands of dolls in Anna's hands, being undressed and dressed again throughout the years, and now, in maternity ward, Anna felt like all of these games with dolls existed entirely for the purpose of preparing her for this moment, for this child”⁶ (Ravn, ch. “Tolvte begyndelse”). The internalization of the patriarchal narrative appears to be one of the most prominent issues regarding becoming a mother, as it creates an unrealistic image of and expectations for motherhood, as pointed out in Brown's article on maternal ambivalence. The other parts of the first crescent appear to be left out of the text, leaving it to speculation.

⁶ “Der var i Annas hænder tusindvis af dukker, der var blevet afklædt og påklædt gennem årene, og nu, på barselsgangen, følte Anna det, som om alle disse dukkelege udelukkende havde eksisteret for at forberede hende på dette øjeblik, på dette barn” (Ravn, ch. “Tolvte begyndelse”)

2.2 *The Demeter decision*

According to Rogers, the Demeter decision is positioned at the bottom of the scheme, where the heroine has reached madness. This decision is the key to unlocking “the attic”, initiating maternal agency (Rogers, *Finding the Plot*, ch. “The key: unlocking maternal agency, unlocking the attic”). The purpose of the Demeter decision is for the heroine to legitimate her feelings, reject the role of the victim, and care for herself and others in a way that empowers (ibid.). I argue that in “Mit Arbejde”, the Demeter decision is the protagonist’s choice to start writing about her experience of becoming a mother. Anna (and the narrator) is a writer by profession, which means that writing is her preferred mode of self-expression. Because of that, she turns towards writing when in need of consolation. In this case, she starts writing once she becomes pregnant, which is when she starts feeling strange when unexpected feelings emerge. It reflects in the quote from Anna’s first entry in her pregnancy diary: “I am writing this solely for myself, though it is almost impossible. <...> At night I wake up and look around. I cannot understand who Aksel is. I do not understand that I am pregnant with his child. <...> Something very strange is about to end and I feel as if I am standing in front of death”⁷ (Ravn, ch. “Tolvte Fortsættelse”). As stated at the beginning of this thesis, one of the objectives is to analyze this novel as a means of identity construction, including initiating maternal agency, and aiming towards maternal subjectivity, which means that this journey starts with writing. It is important to emphasize here that I interpret the Demeter decision to be Anna’s choice of starting to write her notes, not the construction of the novel by the narrator. Despite the latter being a significant factor and a part of the further journey, the act of writing is where this journey upward begins – Anna hopes and aims to analyze and make sense of her feelings and experiences through writing: “had I forgotten / that writing could / make me alive again”⁸ (Ravn, ch. “Sjette Begyndelse”).

⁷ “Jeg skriver dette udelukkende for mig selv, selvom det næsten er umuligt. <...> Om natten står jeg op og ser mig omkring. Jeg kan ikke forstå, hvem Aksel er. Jeg forstår ikke, jeg er gravid med hans barn. <...> Noget meget mærkeligt er ved at rinde ud, og jeg har det, som om jeg står foran døden” (Ravn, ch. “Tolvte Fortsættelse”).

⁸ “havde jeg glemt / at det at skrive kunne / gøre mig levende igen” (Ravn, ch. “Sjette Begyndelse”).

2.3 *Initiation and ascent to goddess*

After the Demeter decision is the stage of ascent to the goddess. This is the stage in which the protagonist's identity seems to be scraped away; it is a stage of depression and introversion (Rogers, *Finding the Plot*, ch. "Descent to the goddess"). It can be precipitated by a life-changing loss, death (ibid.). The mental issues in this stage are necessary for personal journey and growth; it is a signal to turn the gaze inwards and look for answers inside, instead of ignoring and masking the problems (ibid.). In the novel, the significant loss in question is connected to the traumatic experience of childbirth – I have mentioned previously how the Mother understands the birth of her child as the death of her former self. It is also the moment when Anna emerges, initiating the split between Anna and the narrator. The trauma results in Anna suffering from post-partum depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts.

For the most part, this stage is depicted from Anna's perspective and notes. It is most prominent at the beginning of the book, where the distinction between the narrator and Anna is more apparent. It starts with her feeling anxious over not being able to connect to her child the way she believes she is supposed to. "After the childbirth, when they laid the child on Anna's breast, she felt nothing <...> she saw happiness but did not feel it herself"⁹ (Ravn, ch. "Ottende Begyndelse"). The state of distress grows into post-partum depression, which eventually causes thoughts of self-harm: "There are several degrees of calming effects. The first one is simply to keep the knife in mind. <...> Because every time the knives come to her, it stands out more clearly, forming inside her with cool calm, the thought that she can kill herself."¹⁰ (Ravn, ch. "Første Fortsættelse"). Simultaneously, Anna becomes highly anxious, which is a by-product of *alterity* – one of the four elements hindering a mother's subjectivity, according to Baraitser (Baraitser, qtd. in Stone). She feels anxious over nearly everything, but especially about the possibility of not being able to take good enough care of her child or to control every situation they encounter, for example: "the entire way to the nursery, when he is sitting in a seat behind me, I am afraid that he is going to be dead when we get there, just all limp and blue

⁹ "Efter fødslen da de lagde barnet op på Annas bryst følte hun intet. <...> lykken hun så, men ikke delte" (Ravn, ch. "Ottende Begyndelse").

¹⁰ "Der findes forskellige grader af beroligende effekt. Den første er blot at holde kniven i tanken. <...> For hver gang knivene kommer til hende, står det tydeligere frem, former sig i hende med en kølig ro, tanken at hun kan slå sig selv ihjel" (Ravn, ch. "Første Fortsættelse")

<...>”¹¹ (Ravn, ch. “Femogtyvende Fortsættelse”). On top of that, Anna feels like she has lost her identity after becoming a mom and mourns her former self. Childbirth has changed her forever, and at this stage, she feels completely lost, unable to figure out who she is and whom she is supposed to be now: “When the child was born, <...> life got divided into separate sections. <...> It became unclear to me what was my task”¹² (Ravn, ch. “Ellevte Begyndelse”). It is clear that the Mother suffers mentally in this stage, resulting from the traumatic experience of becoming a mom. This is the stage of feeling insecure, uncertain, and lost, which all invites her onto a journey within to tackle and work through these experiences and feelings, and Anna attempts to do so via writing.

2.4 Authority: finding the maternal mentor

The further step of the Mother’s ascent is finding authority – a figure to help and support her in the maternal journey. It is also a figure that the protagonist aspires to be, which motivates her to move further (Rogers, *Finding the Plot* ch. “Authority—finding the maternal mentor”).

What is typical for “Mit Arbejde” is the near-absence of significant external characters. That, in fact, refers to one of the symptoms of depression – people, who are suffering from it, tend to shut others out and focus on themselves. In this sense, the narrative structure reflects the state of a depressed person. However, the only prominent character, which stays in the picture throughout the novel, is Anna’s partner Aksel, who appears to awaken only negative feelings in her. It is important to note that he is also an essential link between Anna and the narrator, as he is both Anna’s and the narrator’s partner, i.e., he is not “fictional” like Anna but simply delegated to her along with the other unpleasant experiences, which occurred during the narrator’s mothering. At one point in the novel, Anna does seek mental help but based on her notes, it is clear that it did not have a significant effect on her, nor did she consider the mental health professionals as authoritative figures, holding the knowledge she needed.

Even though there seems to be no such figure among the people around the Mother, the maternal mentor appears in her life in another form. It is literature she finds most consolidation in – in fact, it is

¹¹ “Hele vejen til vuggestuen, hvor han er så stille på sædet bag mig, er jeg bange for, han skal være død, når vi når frem, bare slap og blå <...>” (Ravn, ch. “Femogtyvende Fortsættelse”)

¹² “Da barnet blev født <...> blev livet opdelt i adskilte afdelinger <...>. Det blev uklart for mig, hvad der var min opgave. (Ravn, ch. “Ellevte Begyndelse”).

mother writers as well as their works and biographies. Becoming a mom can be a lonely experience, especially when one is struggling while they are expected to be thriving. It is one of the most highlighted problems in the novel. In this sense, literature and woman writers become the Mother's mentors, from whom she gains valuable insights on being a mother and whom she can identify with, reducing the feeling of loneliness. Since writing is one of the most prominent topics in the novel, these instances of intertextuality are mostly thought-inducing regarding the relationship between mothering and writing.

Both Anna and the narrator occasionally seem to find themselves struggling with writing. It is primarily due to the prevalent stigma around writing about mothering and the fact that she as an individual has changed so much after childbirth that it affects her writing as a form for self-expression: "I am writing from a brain-dead place. <...> That is why nobody ever wanted to read mothers' books. No one wants to know her"¹³ (Ravn, ch. "Syvende Begyndelse"). It is in the books of other mothers where she finds encouragement and perspective on writing about mothering.

Mary Shelly is one of the most influential woman writers in the Mother's journey. The narrator reads "Frankenstein", which she describes as an "important book on motherhood", as well as Shelly's biography – both of which awaken important thoughts regarding mothering and writing. The narrator understands "Frankenstein" as a genre-hybrid, which draws a parallel between the monster and the book's form. One could argue that this insight encouraged her to accept and embrace her own book as a collection of different genres, reminiscent of the Frankenstein monster. In that sense, Anna, in a way, is a Frankenstein – a creation of the narrator. Here the narrator also contemplates the relationship between fiction and reality, which eventually takes her to the realization that the "story of the happy mom" is fiction, which is being forced onto mothers as reality in order to control them. She also reads Charlotte Perkins Gilman's novella "The Yellow Wallpaper", which is yet another classical example of men taking control over women and the importance of writing as a way of retaining sanity while experiencing feelings of maternal ambivalence. As the narrator interprets it, the novella also shows how difficult it is to be allowed to insist on her own experiences as a mom (Ravn, ch. "Dag Tre, 6."). She realizes that the story about writing about real mothering experiences being harmful to the child and the mother is a lie. The truth is quite the opposite – the narrator understands that by writing this book on

¹³ "Jeg skriver fra et hjernedødt sted. <...> Det er derfor, ingen har villet læse mødres bøger. Ingen ønsker at kende hende." (Ravn, ch. "Syvende Begyndelse").

the horrible things about mothering, she lifts a burden off both herself and the child (ibid.). Lastly, Hiromi Itō and her poetry are also influential in the Mother's journey. The poetry expresses the belief that mothers only being allowed to write about their children is an idea conditioned by society (ibid, ch. "Dag Tre, 7."). Itō has written poems in which she kills her children, which naturally induced controversial debates about her poetry. According to the narrator, this poem should not be seen as a representation of post-partum psychosis but rather a personal expression of a universal experience among all mothers (ibid.). It also adds to the fiction versus reality debate and whether a mother is allowed to write fiction at all. The narrator quotes an excerpt from one of Itō's interviews, in which she answers the question, "What does motherhood mean for your writing?": "<...> if it is a family of farmers, the children are expected to help them with the harvest. The same applies in my profession. I provide my children with food and a roof over their heads, and in exchange, they help me with material for my poems"¹⁴ (Itō, qtd. in Ravn, ch. "Dag Tre, 8.").

There are significantly more authors and their works quoted in the novel. However, these three authors are the most analyzed and thus seem the most important examples of the role literature and mother authors play in the Mother's journey. Through the texts of other mothers, she finds a type of community that provides her with valuable insights on mothering and its relationship with writing, which helps her gain perspective and hopefully make her feel less alone and lost in this journey.

2.5 Autonomy: acknowledging the shadow

In other words, this stage can be called "the reclaiming of the madwoman" (Rogers, *Finding the Plot* ch. "Autonomy—acknowledging the shadow"). That is because "the shadow" represents "everything dark" the heroine has put away, disconnected from herself, and disowned (ibid.). Acknowledging, embracing, and accepting the shadow is necessary for the process of claiming maternal agency, subjectivity, and identity.

The shadow in "Mit Arbejde" is even given a distinct form – it is the character Anna. She is a "place", in which the negative side of mothering is contained – a construct that has been created to

¹⁴ "<...> hvis man er en bondefamilie, så hjælper børnene deres forældre med høsten. Det same gælder for min profession. Jeg forsyner mine børn med mad og tag over hovedet, til gengæld hjælper de mig med materiale til mine digte" (Itō, qtd. in Ravn, ch. "Dag Tre, 8.").

delegate all of the unpleasantness, negative feelings, and experiences to. At the beginning of the book, there appears to be a clear distinction between Anna and the narrator. As I have mentioned previously, it is more or less possible to tell which text is whose. This distinction begins to fall apart in the second part of the novel. At first, there emerges a seemingly subconscious use of both third-person and first-person narration in the same piece of text. The first time it happens is in the scene in which the Mother is at a playground with her child when she sees something strange on the roof of one of the buildings and starts questioning her sanity. It begins with first-person narration: “I sat on a bench in the sun with a cup of coffee”¹⁵ (Ravn, ch. “Fireogtyvende Fortsættelse”). Later, after noticing “a big, black formation” on the roof, the narration switches to third person: “Anna stared at the roof”¹⁶ (ibid.), and then back to first-person again: “The first thing I did when I came home was write down the scene”¹⁷ (ibid.). This is the first time the narrator seems confused, as if she is not sure whose story she is telling, herself or Anna’s. After this, Anna and the narrator begin to engage in active conversation. At this point of the novel, this conversation shows that Anna and the narrator cannot simultaneously exist because it ends in the narrator’s death, as Anna stabs her. Later in the novel, the narrator tries placing Anna in the narrative, which she also exists in, i. e. make them both characters of the story. After a couple of attempts, she understands that it is impossible – either way, one of them becomes “a ghost” in the story, being pushed out of the narrative. This is where the narrator begins to feel something changing: “I am starting to change. Having Anna in the text, in the garden, I notice my voice changing shape”¹⁸ (Ravn, ch. “Dag Fem, 14.”). At this point in the text, it is revealed that placing the two characters in one narrative space becomes impossible, which means that they must either remain strictly separate or become one – and the narrator understands that. She acknowledges Anna as her alter-ego and consciously works towards accepting her as a worthy, necessary part of herself.

¹⁵ “Jeg satte mig på en bænk i solen med en kop kaffe” (Ravn, ch. “Fireogtyvende Fortsættelse”).

¹⁶ “Anna missede op mod taget” (ibid.).

¹⁷ “Det første jeg gjorde, da jeg kom hjem, var at skrive scenen ned” (ibid.).

¹⁸ “Jeg er begyndt at forandre mig. Med Anna i teksten, i haven, kan jeg mærke, at min stemme ændrer form.” (Ravn, ch. “Dag Fem, 14.”).

2.6 Authenticity: recognizing and withdrawing projections

The madwoman's projection is defined as her hatred towards the "masculine" or, in Jung's terms, the "animus", which is the masculine part of the madwoman. (Rogers, *Finding the Plot* ch. "The eternal madwoman and projection"). This part of the heroine frequently demands perfection, control, and domination (ibid. ch. "Authenticity: recognizing and withdrawing projections"). Completing the previous steps of the maternal journey enables the heroine to recognize and withdraw these projections by bringing the light of consciousness into the darkness (ibid.).

As briefly mentioned before, the Mother has reacted negatively to everything masculine ever since childbirth. First of all, ever since birth, her relationship with Aksel starts going downhill. Despite them agreeing to share childcare tasks equally once the child is born, Anna's perception of reality changes after giving birth, and she realizes that it is not going to work that way. Because of this, Aksel's persistent insistence on the previous arrangement upsets Anna and awakens negative feelings in her; they start fighting more and more frequently. She feels as if Aksel is "destroying her", when he makes her go on walks alone or insists on starting bottle-feeding the child. She feels cheated as she remembers being told, "<...> the partner, the man, was to see and share my innermost feelings <...> That in deep loyalty I should live under his protection"¹⁹ (Ravn, ch. "Tiende fortsættelse"), but instead finds out the opposite: "<...> when I had to lie to him that his minimal effort was equal to mine, while I bled from wounds in inner organs he did not have, had to show him gratitude for staying and to calm his nerves, I understood, that there was no one to share my innermost feelings"²⁰ (ibid.). In this sense, Aksel becomes a physical figure in her life, which embodies the false patriarchal narrative of motherhood, which she was forced to believe until her experience showed her otherwise. The anger, which in reality is directed towards the patriarchy, is turned towards her partner, who seems to have good intentions, though simultaneously appears somewhat ignorant.

As mentioned in Rogers, this projection has to be acknowledged and withdrawn in order to continue the maternal journey. Partially, it begins to head in that direction with the emergence of the

¹⁹ "at partneren, manden, skulle se og dele mine inderste følelser <...> At jeg i en dyb loyalitet skulle leve i hans beskyttelse (Ravn, ch. "Tiende fortsættelse").

²⁰ "<...> når jeg måtte lyve over for ham, om at hans minimale indsats var lig med min, mens jeg blødte fra sår i indre organer, han ikke havde, måtte vise ham taknemmelighed for at få ham til at blive, dulme hans nerver, forstod jeg, at der ingen var til at dele mine inderste følelser med" (ibid.).

previously discussed maternal mentor – mother writers and their works. Realizing the bigger picture, patriarchy as a system, which everyone seems to be affected by, helps her realize the root of her problems. The narrator then makes a conscious choice of working towards rewriting the narrative since she realizes she has the power to. Writing becomes a weapon against the status quo, towards which she directs her energy and anger. The narrator starts asking her family for a designated time every day, which she spends away from them, writing. In fact, this is also an essential step towards maternal subjectivity, as argued by Stone – at a certain point, the mother has to let go of the child and create some distance between them. The narrator does so by openly claiming some hours of the day to herself, as she created a goal to “create a life with the family, in which writing is included. And not a life, in which writing exists in spite of the family”²¹ (Ravn, ch. “Dag Et, 1.”). By recognizing the more significant problem and taking action into her hands to work against it, the narrator recognizes and withdraws her projections of the animus.

2.7 Empowered maternalism—integrating private and public spheres

The integration of private and public spheres means integrating the “feminine” and the “masculine”, and it is crucial to finalizing the maternal journey and reaching empowered maternalism (Rogers, *Finding the Plot* ch. “Empowered maternalism—integrating private and public spheres”). This stage is about “having strength to set limits and the willingness to take responsibility for herself and others in a new way” (ibid.).

Towards the end of the book, the Mother seems to become more in control and more at peace. If, throughout the whole novel, Anna was constantly questioning her sanity and doubting whether she perceives reality in an accurate way, then in one of the last chapters, we see a shift in that. In the chapter about 24 hours in Anna’s life, her child gets sick while she has errands to run, and she spends her day trying her best to navigate the situation since Aksel is out of town. Towards the end of the day, Anna is taking her sick child home when it starts raining, and suddenly she feels calm and happy: “It was the certainty, which gave her strength. <...> It filled her with happiness that she could protect the child from severe weather, transport him home safely, read him and understand his sickness signs, and

²¹ “At skabe et liv med familien, hvor skriften er med. Og ikke et liv, hvor skriften lever på trods af familien” (Ravn, ch. “Dag Et, 1.”).

carry him there. She was the child's mother, <...> full of light, a lamp"²² (Ravn, ch. "Første Slutning"). Despite the day being imperfect, she still manages to feel in control and does not beat herself up for not being a perfect mother. It is an important moment in the novel, showing significant progress.

At the very end of the novel, Anna and third-person narration disappear. During the last chapter, in the last meeting with the editor, the narrator admits that this book is hers and written by her only. She accepts Anna and her experiences as her own and publishes them in the form of a novel, giving a literal meaning to "integrating private and the public spheres". She is also nine months pregnant when the novel comes to an end, which would mean that she is healed and ready for this journey to begin again, stepping into it with all she learned during this process of the maternal journey.

Conclusions

This bachelor thesis analyzed the narrative as a means of maternal identity construction and unraveled the structure of the text regarding that. It revealed that the choice of narration is a representation and a product of the traumatic experience of childbirth and becoming a mother in general. Anna and the narrator had to be separated in the narrative in order for them to be able to connect again, which symbolizes acceptance and reconciliation. The split and merge are also visible in the different pieces of text and how they are placed and structured in the novel.

Analyzing the narrative through the lens of the maternal journey model revealed deeply rooted social and psychological problems, which are connected to motherhood and intensely affecting it. Most of them stem from the patriarchal ideology and its construction of the motherhood narrative, which is false, deeply problematic, and has an immense impact on how motherhood is understood and seen by society and mothers themselves. The traditional, phallogocentric narrative and approach to motherhood, which many women internalize at a very young age, create false expectations of the motherhood experience, resulting in deep shame and mental health problems. This narrative needs to be actively rejected and "rewritten", and novels like "Mit Arbejde" contribute to this purpose.

²² "Det var denne sikkerhed, der gav hende styrke. <...>At hun kunne beskytte barnet mod voldsomt vejr, kunne transportere ham hjem i sikkerhed, at hun kunne læse ham og forstå hans sygdomstegn, og bære ham der, det fyldte hende med en lykke. Hun var barnets mor <...> fuld af lys, en lampe" (Ravn, ch. "Første Slutning").

In this sense, the effectiveness of motherhood literature is represented and highlighted in this novel. For the Mother, the works by mother authors become a place where she can seek consolation and motivation as well as find inspiration. These authors play a significant role in her journey towards subjectivity and maternal agency. The literary works and the authors' biographies and interviews reveal the problematic relationship between mothering in writing, which is due to both the patriarchal tradition of literature and the nature of mothering (lack of time and separate space). Although only three such authors are mentioned in the analysis, many others are also present in the novel, making intertextuality a prominent theme in the book and possibly worthy of separate analysis.

The employment of Rogers' model of the maternal journey to analyze the narrative structure revealed that the novel challenges this model. The Mother's journey is not circular, as the model suggests, but represents only the second crescent. The descent into madness is not depicted in the novel, as it starts when the madness is already reached, and the Mother is in crisis. The most straightforward reason for this is the fact that Rogers' model seems to be most applicable to the traditional narrative of a female protagonist's journey, which follows her for a more extended period, maybe even her whole life, thus making it possible to see the different stages of her life, completing the journey. "Mit Arbejde" only follows the Mother for three years, making it impossible to see her completing this entire journey. The fact that the model is only partially applicable to the narrative of "Mit Arbejde" proves that Ravn's novel is narratologically unconventional and subversive. Although Rogers' goal in constructing this model was to prove that narrative and structure are not inherently patriarchal, Ravn's refusal to fit into the frames and models of traditional phallogocentric narratology only enhances and highlights her novel's purpose of rebelling against the patriarchal ideology and the models for motherhood and writing embedded in it.

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Santrauka

Papasakoti motinystę: identiteto konstravimas Olgos Ravn romane „Mit Arbejde“

Šiame bakalauro darbe, pasitelkiant naratologijos bei motinystės studijų teorijos įžvalgas ir sąvokas, analizuojama, kaip Olgos Ravn romane „Mit Arbejde“ (2020) naratyviai yra konstruojama pirmą vaiką pagimdžiusios, rašančios motinos tapatybė. Darbe nagrinėjama, kaip romano naratyvinė sąranga atspindi motinystės krizę, bei kaip motinystės patirtys ir jų refleksija koreliuoja su teoriniu naratologiniu motinystės kelionės modeliu, kurį siūlo Megan Rogers (2017).

Šio darbo analizė sudaryta iš dviejų dalių. Pirmiausia, dėl sudėtingos romano struktūros, išskaidomi naratologiniai romano lygmenys, siekiant užtikrinti sklandžią tolimesnę analizę. Antroji analizės dalis yra struktūruojama pagal Megan Rogers naratologinio motinystės kelionės modelio stadijas. Šioje dalyje analizuojama Motinos kelionė identiteto ir subjektyvumo link, aiškinamasi, kaip šios kelionės stadijos atsispindi romano struktūroje. Šių stadijų nagrinėjimas atskleidžia veiksnius, paskatiniusius ir dariusius įtaką motinos krizei, o taip pat ir tuos, kurie įgalino jos įveikimą.

Analizė parodė, kad šio romano naratyvinė konstrukcija yra psichologiškai traumuojančios patirties atspindys bei produktas. Analizės konstravimas pagal Rogers modelį atskleidė giliai įsitvirtinusias socialines bei psichologines problemas, kurios darė įtaką Motinos krizei, kadangi jos kyla iš klaidingo, patriarchato sukurto motinystės naratyvo. Šis romanas akcentuoja rašymo apie motinystės patirtis svarbą, išryškindamas komplikotą santykį tarp motinų ir rašymo, tačiau tuo pačiu demonstruodamas jo teigiamą įtaką minėtojo motinystės naratyvo atžvilgiu, kadangi taip griaunami nerealistiški motinystės idealai ir lūkesčiai. Galiausiai, romano naratyvinės struktūros tik dalinis atitikimas pagal Rogers modelį rodo, jog „Mit Arbejde“ struktūra yra nekonvencinė ir subversyvi, atspindinti romano atsisakymą tilpti į falocentrinės tradicijos suformuotą naratologinę struktūrą, ir tokiu būdu simbolizuoja maištą prieš patriarchalinę ideologiją ir jos įtvirtintus motinystės ir rašymo modelius.

Sammendrag

At fortælle moderskab: identitetskonstruktion i Olga Ravns roman "Mit Arbejde"

I denne bacheloropgave analyserer jeg hvordan en førstegangsmors identitet konstrueres via teksten i Olga Ravns roman "Mit Arbejde" (2020). Det gør jeg ved at kombinere begreb af narratologi og moderskabstudier. I denne opgave analyseres det hvordan romanens narrativstruktur afspejler moderskabskrisen og hvordan moderskabsoplevelser og deres refleksion korrelerer med den teoretiske narratologiske model for moderens rejse af Megan Rogers (2017).

Analysen består af to dele. Først, på grund af romanens kompliceret naratologisk struktur, optrevles romanens narrativlag, for at sikre en effektiv analyse. Den anden del struktureres efter stadier af den narratologiske Megan Rogers' model for moderens rejse. I denne del analyseres Moderens rejse mod identitet og subjektivitet, og hvordan disse stadier afspejles i romanens struktur. Analysen af disse stadier afslører de faktorer, der førte Moderen til krisen, samt dem, der hjalp med at overvinde den.

Analysen viste, at romanens narrativstruktur er en produkt og en skildring af en traumatiserende oplevelse. Analysens konstruktion efter Rogers' model afslørede dybt rodfæstede sociale og psykologiske problemer, som påvirkede moderfigurens krise, fordi de stammer fra den falske moderskabsnarrativ, som er skabt af patriarkatet. Denne roman fremhæver betydningen for forholdet mellem moderskab og skrift, mens den også viser, hvor kompliceret dette forhold er. Romanen viser, hvor vigtigt det er at skrive om ægte moderskabsoplevelser, da det hjælper med at kæmpe imod urealistiske patriarkalske moderskabsideal og –forventninger. Til sidst, det, at romanens narrativstruktur passer kun delvist ind i Rogers' model viser, at strukturen af "Mit Arbejde" er ukonventionel og subversiv. Den afspejler romanens nægtelse at passe ind i den traditionelle narratologiske struktur, skabt af den fallocentriske tradition, og det symboliserer et oprør mod den patriarkalske ideologi og de moderskabs- og skrivemodeller, som er indlejrede i den.