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(RECOMMENDED CITATION)

BOOKS

Arnhild Lauveng, *I morgen var jeg alltid en løve* [*Tomorrow I Was Always a Lion*], Oslo, J.W. Cappelens Forlag AS, 2005, 200 p.

As well as being a person who has defied most people's pessimistic expectations about the likely course of her adult life, Arnhild Lauveng is also the author of a book that challenges any easy or handy review profiling. To say that she has received the Norwegian Fritt Ord (Free Speech) Honorary Award in 2008 would be only one way of introducing her work. Indeed, mentioning this kind of acknowledgement would speak for the sincerity and honesty that pervade her presentation not only of a painful personal experience, but also of systems and institutions that cannot cope with people who need much more support to deal with similar challenges.

Another thing that speaks just as much about the importance and success of her book would be the number of languages into which the volume has been translated so far: English, French, German, Spanish, Polish and Lithuanian are only a few editions to mention, with a Romanian version to be published soon. Speaking about translations, one thing that appears to have posed a challenge to all the foreign editors so far seems to be the title of the book itself. Thus, none of the existing translations have chosen to keep its *ad litteram* rendering in the respective languages.[1] This editorial decision is probably due to the fact that, at first glance, the syntagm *I morgen var jeg alltid en løve* [*Tomorrow I Was Always a Lion*] appears to make little logical sense, blending, as it does, a future placed in the past with an adverbial indicating permanence. Moreover, what would a lion have to do with it all? All these elements occurring at the same time were probably felt as potentially confusing for the readers. However, one cannot help feeling that, by choosing to replace the title syntagm with various euphemisms based on ideas or images found in the book, the foreign editions may have failed to capture the very

[1] In English, the title was translated as A Road Back from Schizophrenia: A Memoir (New York, Skyhorse Publishing, 2012).

spirit of the book, present in its title: the author's journey from indescribable confusion to headstrong determination to live life to the fullest. In fact, this title is nothing but the last line of the poem that opens the volume, so that, as soon as one reads these introductory lines, one is able not only to understand the title thoroughly but also to prepare for the story ahead.

The lion metaphor is, moreover, a recurring one in the book. Even if choosing to make it a defining metaphor for the "happy" outcome of the book might seem like a cliché, especially when the power of this metaphor is, furthermore, predicted on its contrast with the sheep metaphor, the choice is not random. However, based on this element alone, someone may think that the story of Arnhild Lauveng can be summed up quite simply: it is be the story of someone who began as a humble, gray sheep in a sad flock marred by illness, but who knew that she had the inner strength to overcome her seemingly impossible situation and did so in the end. Seen from this perspective, the subject of Arnhild Lauveng's book is a well-known recipe for any successful novel: the heroine who beats the odds to find professional success and a fulfilled personal life.

Except that, with this book, things are never what they seem, and they are very far from simple.

First, the narrative is full of animal metaphors, real or imagined: besides sheep and lions, there are horses, crocodiles and egg-laying dragons, all of them meant, as the author acknowledges herself, to express the inexpressible pain of mental suffering. Because this is, in fact, the topic of Arnhild Lauveng's book: living one's young age as a schizophrenia patient. Secondly, even if it may be read as fiction – and many of us would prefer to know such experiences may only be imaginary – it is a true account, a memoir of the author's inner and outer journey through one of the most mysterious and least accessible mental illnesses known to medical science to this day.

Fictional examples of books depicting mental illness, and especially schizophrenia, even if not abundant, can be found in world literature. A semi-autobiographical one, Joanne Greenberg's *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, is cited by Lauveng herself. Besides, the Norwegian Critics Prize for Literature in 2010 also acknowledged the value of a story on the very same topic, told by Beate Grimsrud (*I en dare fri*).[2] Meanwhile, unlike fictional or semi-fictional accounts, non-fictional stories of schizophrenia have steadily increased in number, especially since the 1990s. Some of them are written by therapists on behalf of their patients (*Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl: The True Story of "Renee"*, by Marguerite Sechehaye), others by journalists documenting patients' experiences (*The Quiet Room: A Journey Out of the Torment of Madness*, by Lori Schiller with Amanda Bennett). Others still are testimonials written by patients themselves (*Mind without a Home: A Memoir of Schizophrenia*, by Kristina Morgan, or *The Collected Schizophrenias: Essays*, by Esmé Weijun Wang). Very few of them, however, are authored by professionals – psychologists or psychotherapists – who

[2] A Fool, Free (English translation by Kari Dickson), London, Head of Zeus, 2015. Grimsrud's novel has also been awarded or nominated for several other Norwegian and Swedish literary prizes.

happen to be patients themselves. This double perspective allows for a much more complex and nuanced look into the subject, which explains why such works will always enjoy lasting attention. In English, the book that has become such a classic is Elyn R. Saks' *The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey through Madness*. The author is Professor of Law, Psychology, Psychiatry, and Behavioural Sciences at the University of Southern California Law School and has lived with schizophrenia for most of her life.

Speaking with professional authority about a condition one is painfully intimate with cannot be an easy feat, as Arnhild Lauveng is abundantly aware of, too. Numerous times during her account she underlies the fundamental difference between being a patient, unaware of one's actions and reasons, and being in the therapist's chair, writing, remembering, explaining and giving hope to the many people out there who desperately need it. Unlike any other author mentioned so far, Lauveng is uniquely positioned to do just that – inspire courage. That is because, as she makes it clear from the very first line of the book, she is no longer a schizophrenia patient. In other words, what she claims is a reality that very few patients can hope for and very professionals will acknowledge: the fact that it is possible to find one's way back from the blood-red, iron forest that she felt mental illness to be like and live to use all the colours in one's life box.

The whole book rests on metaphors like the ones above. Besides, plenty of literary and scientific references are scattered throughout. Some of these are so well-known to Norwegian readers that they do not require explanation, such as, for instance, the poems of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, the lines of André Bjerke or Alf Prøysen or those of a German song, not to mention the whole chapter in which parallels are drawn between a patient's helpers during their journey to recovery and Askeladden's helpers in the folk tale. Needless to say, such references need to be explained to readers from other cultures, something that adds to the complexity of the translator's task. What is really remarkable about Lauveng's book is the way she knows how to combine such easy-to-understand allegories of illness with significant scientific data. Not only does she mention and explain the procedures and outcome of several psychological experiments, but she does so at critical points in the book, with a view to demystifying common misconceptions about this particular illness. By doing so, she definitely helps complete the complex imagery relying on metaphor with solid scientific fact, proving herself, in the process, to be a highly trained, reliable and efficient professional for her own patients.

At the same time, even when she talks with authority about psychological fact and medical classification, the author does so from the perspective of the patient, telling the readers all she would have liked to have been told by the professionals in the system at the time of her own hospitalization and therapy. This way, she hopes to change things not only for the patients, but also for the members of the medical profession involved in treating schizophrenia. As she herself states, it is not treatment the patients lack, it is care. Care for their feelings, for their humanity, for their individual needs. And courage to believe that their condition is not hopeless, that they can still be functional and useful members of society. In other words, that they can keep their dignity by being allowed

to use their skills to become independent. This, in turn, can be done by looking at them not primarily as patients, but as fellow human beings, something that seems often forgotten once one becomes diagnosed with any form of mental illness.

Arnhild Lauveng's book is not an easy read. Not because she does not use a warm, empathetic and sometimes funny tone, and not because her words and images are not easy to relate to. It is because her experiences with the illness and with the systems in charge of dealing with the patients are sometimes terrifying. But, precisely because of this reason, it is a book that needs to be read by patients and professionals alike. One cannot start changing – whether it's minds or systems – without looking the truth in the face. For those of us who have not experienced the destructive force of a mental illness like schizophrenia, Lauveng's book is a revelation. For psychologists and psychotherapists, it may be an inspiration and a call for change. And for patients themselves, the most sincere proof of deep understanding and a beacon of hope.

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