

and less dramatic role than the legendary Kannasto. In comparison with women socialists in other ethnic groups or in the English-speaking movement, Finnish women were numerically very significant, forming one-third to one-half of the socialist membership. The decade of the 1920s represented the high point for Finnish women's organizations as they joined the new communist movement using their press, the "sewing circles," and the women's labour leagues to educate and organize their Finnish sisters. Language

and cultural barriers, however, proved difficult to surmount and the gap between the Finnish women and other groups remained large.

Lindström-Best's book makes fascinating reading and it reminds us that women's, labour and ethnic history cannot ignore the experiences of women immigrants because their views and experiences were often different from those of their male compatriots. While this book leaves out much material on Finnish women by choice — their involvement in

cooperatives, other political groups, and their rich cultural activities in the arts, literature, music, theatre and sports — it nevertheless conveys a sense of what these women's lives were like and how they created a place of their own in Canada under circumstances not of their making. Readers will regret the lack of a concluding chapter to summarize the author's findings. This book, however, clearly deserves a wide audience among those interested in social history, women's studies and the Finnish experience in Canada.

EGALIA'S DAUGHTERS

Gerd Brantenberg. Translated by Louis Mackay. Washington: The Seal Press, 1985

K. Börje Vähämäki

In 1977, this novel was much more revolutionary than it is in the late 1980s. Yet, it seems to provoke a lot of discussion, and is certainly a great instrument in the important sensitizing process that our society needs, particularly in the area of linguistic sexism.

Meaning is a matter of opposition. Contrasts are necessary to bring out, as conspicuously as possible, the distinctness of definitions. Gerd Brantenberg's *Egalia's Daughters* gives an account of a society in which the gender roles are reversed.

This novel, the subtitle of which is "A Satire of the Sexes," presents the country of Egalia where matriarchy reigns, where values and attitudes that even remotely pertain to sex roles are reversed. The treatment involves a great variety of issues and topics, and provides some thought provoking insights into the nature and foundations of gender roles in society.

The idea that language reflects social and political attitudes even in its alleged arbitrary linguistic conventions is by no means new. The Saussurean notion that the linguistic sign is arbitrary rather than bound in any way to its contents was revolutionary in the early decades of this century among linguists; its power lay primarily in the break with earlier views of meaning.

Brantenberg's novel, although not among the first, clearly one of the more

consistent and thorough works employing lexical gender reversal, powerfully discloses the role of convention in the "allegedly" arbitrary linguistic sign. Many linguists, myself included, who were taught the random relationship that holds between sign and object, have had to acknowledge the tremendous power of convention and the attitudes underlying convention. *Egalia's Daughters* shows major strength in its consistent attention to sexist language. Thus the generic pronouns are *she, her, herself*. Ordinary words such as man, woman and male, female have been manipulated in a thoughtful translation process into *manwom, wom, and fele, mafele* respectively, incisively using derivation for "male" words in contrast to conventional English use of "female" derivatives. In markedness terms, the female is the unmarked, "normal" representation of generic sex. Another good example is *huvwom* for *human*. What is supposedly gender neutral, is female.

Linguistically this principle has some humorous consequences: *heir* vs *heirass*, *lion* vs *lionass* (*heirass* and *lioness* both being marked masculine). Most typically the countersexist terms serve to sensitize the reader to the sexism implicit in a variety of seemingly innocent words. The patriarchy hidden in the patronymic tradition in English as well as in the Scandinavian languages becomes pressingly apparent when the *housebound* (husband) of one of the main characters carries the name *Christopher Lizdaughter*.

Gender role attitudes are results of thought patterns typically taught and learned by indoctrination and confirmed by ritual, ceremony and male centered historical writing. The novel confirms

this position both in its choice of characters and its manner of argumentation. The main characters are children or youths going through puberty. They are people who are in the process of formulating their worldview, their sexual identity, and their political position. Many of the scenes involve family discussions, peer discussions or classroom situations.

While some of these situations are stereotypical and somewhat artificial, once again the novel, by virtue of its relentless pursuit of aspects of gender dictated behaviours where traditionally none have been recognized, is quite remarkable. The very notion of sexual behaviour, of intercourse, and various attitudes toward love making are followed through repeatedly and with some new perspective appearing each time. In this reversed culture, *menwim* rarely experience any sexual pleasure because for them sex and conception cannot be separated, because they are taking contraceptive pills with a multitude of side effects, while *wim* are often polygamous, and only interested in physical pleasure. Petronius, the main *mafele* character, experiences rape, but is too ashamed to report it; he would be blamed as having brought it on himself. There are *maidman's balls* where the boy's *maidmanhood* (virginity) is taken. Even if the idea is to reveal the prevalent patterns of male dominated and male conceived sexual behaviour, the ultimate result in the novel is an indictment of the deplorable, outright tragic state of attitudes toward sexuality in contemporary society.

The account of Petronius' anxieties about his physical development during puberty was moving and thought provoking. It is, of course, customary to

describe and view puberty as the period when sexuality is discovered. But it is remarkable that the experience should to such an extent involve fears and concerns of how one will fare as a boy in relation to the prevalent "norms": not to become too tall, to become plump and not too skinny,

not to get hair on the chest, or elsewhere for that matter, to have a small enough penis, to worry how one is going to look wearing the mandatory "peho" (short for penis holder and the counterpart to bras in our society) which is to protrude from the skirts boys must wear, etc.

Language is intimately linked with thought and is a subliminal force of incredible power, evidenced by the very resistance linguistic sex neutralizing efforts still evoke today. *Egalia's Daughters* will most likely remain a milepost in the liberation of our language.

ALVA, ETT KVINNOLIV

Sissela Bok. Stockholm: Bonnier, 1987.

Kerstin Camenietzki

Alva, ett Kvinnoliv is a biography of Alva Myrdal, Swedish educator and writer, who was born in 1902 and died a few years ago. She was married to Gunnar Myrdal, the well-known Swedish economist and politician, who was the author of many books, among them *An American Dilemma*, published in 1944.

Alva's life was seemingly successful. She earned her B.A. in Sweden at the University of Stockholm in 1924. This was quite an achievement then, since girls were often not admitted into regular public high-schools, but had to study privately with tutors. From 1936 to 1948, Alva was the founder and director of an institute in Stockholm focusing on educational and child psychology. This institute trained young women to become kindergarten teachers.

Throughout her life, Alva was actively involved in political debates in Sweden, always advocating issues from a radical point of view. She was particularly interested in child education, families and

housing policy. She emphasized freedom and equality — equality between children and adults, men and women, rich and poor and peoples from all religions, countries and cultures.

From the end of World War II, Alva was often called on by the United Nations for various assignments in New York, Paris and Geneva. She also served as the Swedish ambassador to India from 1955 to 1959.

The author, Sissela Bok, is the daughter of Alva and Gunnar, and a Professor of Philosophy at Brandeis University. The book is therefore much more than a biography of Alva Myrdal. The author is, rightfully, proud of her mother's achievements, but she also brings out the "life of a woman" as the subtitle reads. Alva struggled most of her life with the conflict between marriage, family life and a career, or even just being able to work. She found her working life interrupted by having to accompany her husband on his many trips, particularly to the US. At times she felt as a mere appendage to her husband's career. Alva felt it a duty to work, once having received a higher education. Family life became increasingly difficult. Alva's problem was not just a social, but also a psychological one. Her husband had a strong, even domineering personality and Alva seemed to have lost her own identity when she met him. She even burned her diaries to start a new,

better life with him. This was, as her daughter explains, too great a sacrifice for Alva. As conflicts grew between father and son, Alva seemed to stay back, avoiding the conflict. Sissela Bok is very open about her parents' difficulties without being emotional. Instead, the book ends on a very positive note and reveals a strong friendship between mother and daughter later in their lives, after the difficult years in the Myrdal family.

Alva Myrdal wrote several books, many of these while accompanying her husband abroad. She wrote *Nation and Family* in 1941. A new edition was published in 1968 (with an introduction by Patrick Moynihan of Harvard). In 1956 she published *Women's Two Roles* together with Viola Klein, but she had some difficulty finishing this book. She had become involved with women in developing countries and found that the book was relevant only to women in more privileged and affluent societies.

Alva was not a fact-finding researcher, but a writer and reformer who tried to influence public opinion and governments, both in Sweden and throughout the world. Her interests reflected the social issues prevalent during many decades of this century. She became increasingly involved in international issues, such as women's rights across the world, disarmament and the problems of developing countries.

EARLY SPRING

Tove Ditlevsen. Translated with an Introduction by Tiina Nunnally. Seattle, Washington: The Seal Press, 1985.

Ellen Christensen Edmonds

Whenever you pick up a book in translation you cannot help wondering what is so special about this particular book to warrant the efforts of a translator. This state-

ment is not an attempt to judge the art of translation or to criticize the individual translator, but a realization of the enormously difficult task entailed in the translation of any piece of literature, where the sound of words is a factor determining the final product. This is particularly true in a work such as Tove Ditlevsen's *Early Spring*.

Ditlevsen is, as Nunnally notes in her introduction, "one of Denmark's best loved and most read authors." First and foremost, she is a poet. This is evident also in her prose writings. Her language is clear

and approachable, her diction is colourful and sharp, and her style is economical. Her illustrations, painted with irony and humour, conjure up thought-provoking images that will remain in the mind of the reader.

Early Spring is the part of Ditlevsen's autobiography that covers her childhood and youth. In the telling of her story the author is intensely personal and at the same time uniquely universal. The events are peculiarly Danish, in some cases peculiarly Copenhagen, but the feelings they evoke both in the child Tove and in the