



HAL
open science

Pietist Nostalgia. Aesthetization of Faith and the Nordic Revival Movements in Scandinavian Post-WWII Literature

Thomas Mohnike

► **To cite this version:**

Thomas Mohnike. Pietist Nostalgia. Aesthetization of Faith and the Nordic Revival Movements in Scandinavian Post-WWII Literature. Joachim Grage; Thomas Mohnike; Lena Rohrbach. Aesthetics of Protestantism in Northern Europe. Exploring the Field, Brepols, pp.215-232, 2022, Aesthetics of Protestantism in Northern Europe, 978-2-503-60160-1. hal-03981675

HAL Id: hal-03981675

<https://hal.science/hal-03981675>

Submitted on 9 Feb 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Pietist Nostalgia

Aesthetization of Faith and the Nordic Revival Movements in Scandinavian Post-World War II Literature

In 2001, the well-known Swedish writer Per Olov Enquist published the historical novel *Lewis resa* (*Lewi's Journey*, 2001), a double biography of Pentecost leader Petrus Lewi and the writer Sven Lidman. In his novel, Enquist argues through its intriguing narration that Pietist movements such as the Moravian Brethren (*Herrnhuter*), and subsequent Pietist-inspired revival movements (*väckelserörelser*) had an enormous impact not only on the social and economic transformations of Nordic societies, but even on the language and aesthetics of Nordic art. The influence is not easily traceable, Enquist writes, as the Moravians did not seek to impose their organization, but spread their ideas, texts, songs, etc. to those it would interest without asking them to adhere to the entirety of their teachings, often with one of their centres of practice located in Christiansfeld in Southern Denmark as a main place of agency. The seemingly non-religious, modern Nordic welfare states have, he suggests, some of their most important roots in pious communities and practices, and this is palpable in its literature and art.¹ If Enquist is right, this 'second Reformation', as Pietist often described their endeavours, has perhaps marked more significantly the aesthetics of Scandinavian literature than the Scandinavian versions of Lutheranism of the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

Enquist's novel, however, is not only an inquiry into the forgotten roots of the modern Swedish welfare state, which is in its collective childhood. It is also a dialogue with the lost world of the narrator's own childhood, a nostalgic act of revisiting an ever lost home, elaborating its strength in this tension between collective and individualist remembrance; it is an example of a bundle of narrative techniques that I propose calling Pietist nostalgia. According to this perspective, Pietist nostalgia would thus be a specific form of nostalgia, structured, as I will show in the following pages, around four elements that relate directly to the Pietist tradition. These elements are 1) a dead, but present father figure, 2) a lost childhood as an often precisely located chronotope, 3) biblical intertexts that structure the narration, and 4) a utopian longing for regaining the lost world, not by restoring it, but by transforming it into something new, most often through a staging of aesthetic transcendence.

1 Per Olov Enquist, *Lewis resa: roman* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2001).

Pietist nostalgia would thus be a specific form of modern consciousness of an irreconcilable distance to a bygone era, attainable only through acts of remembrance and imagination. In fact, since the neologism of ‘nostalgia’ had been forged by the Basel medical doctor Johannes Hofer at the end of the seventeenth century to describe the suffering of homesickness, the notion has moved beyond medical discourse and become an often-oscillating cross-disciplinary concept. In her historically and theoretically very useful attempt to grasp the phenomenon of nostalgia, *The Futures of Nostalgia* (2001), Svetlana Boym describes nostalgia in this tradition as ‘a longing for home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but also a romance with one’s own fantasy’.² Nostalgia is thus an attempt to bridge the unbridgeable distance between the place of being of an individual person and an ideal place of dwelling by the use of fantasy. Boym insists on the observation that the experienced rupture between what is and what had or could have been is a defining and necessary condition of nostalgia. Even though nostalgia is centred in the imaginative act of the individual, she continues,

nostalgia goes beyond individual psychology. At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually, it is a yearning for a different time — the time of our childhood, the slower rhythm of our dreams. In a broader sense, nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition.³

Nostalgia is thus not only a question of place, but even of time: returning to the place where one has grown up will never signify coming back to childhood. Even if the place might only have changed in detail (which is not likely), the difference in time makes a return impossible. The object of nostalgia is thus always a chronotope in the Bakhtinian sense, a narrative place-time, as can be exemplified by Enquist’s and the welfare state’s childhood in *Lewis resa*.

In what follows, I will undertake a handful of close readings in order to develop the proposed model in more depth. After a much too short, but necessary discussion of the place and pace of Pietist ideas in Nordic societies in order to suggest the validity of my argument of Pietist influence, I will discuss the phenomenon of Pietist nostalgia in works by Jonas Gardell, Per Olov Enquist, and Göran Tunström. All narrative studied here reconnect their universes to the bygone world of (Pietist) Christian belief by using what I would describe as nostalgia and by transgressing this state through its transformation into an artistic epiphany, and they do this through use of tension between individual and collective memory in the of unfolding their stories. The third part will focus on Karen Blixen’s *Babette’s Feast*, which uses the same techniques, but in more radical way; the chapter will end with some general discussion and perspectives. We will see that the above-mentioned elements of Pietist nostalgia are closely related to what we have proposed to be the five principles of Scandinavian aesthetics.



2 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. xiii.

3 Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, p. xv.

A Much Too Short Introduction to Pietist Influence and History in Scandinavia

Recent research in the cultural history of Northern Europe confirms the idea of a significant impact of Pietist-inspired revival and reform movements on the Nordic countries. Although these movements are sometimes in more or less pronounced conflict with each other, they share a number of ideas, characteristics, and historical contexts. Dag Thorkildsen argued convincingly, for example, that one should not understand Pietist religious revivalism as a popular response to the Enlightenment and rational approaches among the clergy, but rather as part of the modernization process of the Scandinavian states in the nineteenth and twentieth century, because Pietists introduced new forms of cooperation, education, and egalitarian thought.⁴ Thorkildsen names Grundtvig as an important and influential Pietist-inspired example; Henrik Horstbøll follows in a similar way the impact of Eric Pontoppidan's Pietist Catechism on Danish and Norwegian social and ethical thought,⁵ and the cultural historian Nina Witoszek argues that the many Pietist-inspired movements 'were not just reforming religion but contributing to a civic Bildung'.⁶ She asserts that this specific constellation led to the 'Scandinavian Sonderweg' of nation-building, characterized by reformation instead of revolution in the nineteenth century and by the creation of a specific 'ecohumanist' discourse that traces the particular character of Nordic nationalities from Nordic nature.⁷ Pietist-inspired religious movements, such as the Moravian brothers or the Halle-based Pietists around August Hermann Francke, thus had an impact too long overlook on the social practices, ideas, and aesthetics in the Nordic countries.⁸

In fact, Pietism could be the missing link that explains why the five principles of aesthetics in Scandinavia proposed in the introduction to this volume seem to resemble Calvinist ideals rather than Lutheran, as discussed in the present volume by Ueli Zahnd and Arne Bugge Amundsen. Early German Pietism, which forms the most important source of Nordic Pietists, was inspired by Calvinist ideas and, consequently, aesthetics. It is in this milieu that we can find the aesthetics and ethics that seem to be typical of Nordic aesthetics and cultural practices. These movements were, as the historian of Pietism Douglas H.

4 Dag Thorkildsen, 'Religious Identity and Nordic Identity', in *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, ed. by Bo Stråth and Øystein Sørensen (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997), pp. 138–60 (p. 144).

5 Henrik Horstbøll, 'Pietism and the Politics of Catechisms', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 25.2 (2004), 143–60.

6 Nina Witoszek, *The Origins of the 'Regime of Goodness': Remapping the Cultural History of Norway* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2011), p. 61.

7 Witoszek, 'Regime of Goodness', pp. 60–85.

8 Important contributions to the study of the impact of Pietism in Northern Europe include Anders Jarlert, *Läsarfolket - från gammalläseri till nyortodoxi: förändringar i västsvensk kyrkoväckelse med särskild hänsyn till utvecklingen i Marks, Bollebygd och Kinds härader under 1800-talet*, Västsvensk kultur och samhällsutveckling genom tiderna, 6 (Göteborg: Humanistiska fakulteten, 1997); Aage B. Sørensen, 'On Kings, Pietism and Rent-Seeking in Scandinavian Welfare States', *Acta Sociologica*, 41.4 (1998), 363–75; Ann Öhrberg, 'Imagery of God in Moravian Songs from Eighteenth-Century Sweden', in *Rhetoric and Literature in Finland and Sweden, 1600–1900*, ed. by Pernille Harsting and Jon Viklund, Nordic Studies in the History of Rhetoric, 2 (Copenhagen: NNRH, 2008), pp. 1–28 <http://www.nnrh.dk/NSHR/nshr2/index.html> [accessed 10 March 2022]; *Piety and Modernity*, ed. by Anders Jarlert, The Dynamics of Religious Reform in Church, State and Society in Northern Europe, 1780–1920, 3 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012); Lars Jakob, *Wege in den Norden der hallische Pietismus in den skandinavischen Ländern des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Kleine Schriftenreihe der Franckeschen Stiftungen, 14 (Halle: Verl. der Franckeschen Stiftungen, 2014).

Shantz writes, above all conventicle movements where laymen met in each other's homes to discuss 'the Bible and devotional books, engaged in edifying conversation, and shared their understandings and experiences with one another.'⁹ These informal groups created non-formalized networks that expressively were not orientated towards status in society, but towards the grade of true belief. It was thus a new, rather flat form of organization, but not all-inclusive. On the contrary, these Pietists 'saw themselves as more perfect and more sanctified than their neighbours, leading them to separate themselves from the ways and pleasures of "the world"'.¹⁰ This critical attitude towards 'cultural' Christians was paired with a 'strong sense of individualism, with subjective claims to intimate and direct dealing with God'. This would lead 'these Pietist to close self-examination and to interpreting their feelings as the moving and speaking of God within them'.¹¹ All these are elements found in some works of Scandinavian literature that we will discuss below.

Through the activity of the Pietist reformer August Hermann Francke, the Calvinist ethics of work entered the world of Pietists. His Halle orphanage included schools, workshops, printing studies, and pharmacies and became one of the main educational models for raising good Christians. Francke taught that commitment and success in work was one of the 'indubitable signs' that one is a child of God. However, 'Francke's Pietism differed from Dutch Calvinism and English Puritanism on one key point: his Pietist ethic was directed not so much toward encouraging capitalist activity as to encouraging education and educational activity'.¹² Humanist knowledge like Latin, Greek, and even Semitic languages like Hebrew were important to the schools in the orphanage, as was practical work and the living word. As Max Weber pointed out, Francke's idea was 'the methodological development of [an individual's] state of grace to a higher and higher degree of certainty and perfection', an idea that he would describe as profane, that is non-monastic, Christian asceticism. 'Labor in a calling was [...] the ascetic activity *par excellence*',¹³ the calling (*Beruf / Berufung*) being the role that God had given to the individual.

Many young Protestant intellectuals from all over the Protestant world and thus also from Scandinavia spent some time in Halle in the orphanage schools and the nearby university, and its publications were widely read, quickly becoming the direct¹⁴ or indirect model for educational institutions in Scandinavia, Grundtvig's folk high school movement without doubt being one of its important later heirs. This is a field that should be studied in more detail, however, not the immediate object of the present chapter, but rather its backdrop and premise: if Pietism had a significant impact on ethics and educational practices and ideals even outside the religious sphere in Scandinavia, as had been shown, it is here

9 Douglas H. Shantz, *An Introduction to German Pietism: Protestant Renewal at the Dawn of Modern Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), p. 115.

10 Shantz, *Introduction to German Pietism*, p. 116.

11 Shantz, *Introduction to German Pietism*, p. 116.

12 Shantz, *Introduction to German Pietism*, p. 138.

13 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 2nd edn (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976), p. 133.

14 Early examples include the schools established by the missionaries in Danish Tranquebar and the Royal orphanage in Copenhagen. See Jochen Birkenmeier, 'Die weltweite Ausstrahlung des Halleschen Waisenhauses', in *Kinder, Krätze, Caritas: Waisenhäuser in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. by Claus Veltmann and Jochen Birkenmeier (Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen zu Halle, 2009), pp. 101–11 (pp. 104–05).

that we should look for the predecessors for Scandinavian aesthetic and ethic ideals of the twentieth and twenty-first century. In fact, the five supposed principles of simplicity, logocentrism, tension between pronounced individualism and collectivism, a specific kind of relatedness to the world, and a commitment to a Protestant ethic can be related to the sketched Pietistic ascetic Christianity. From this perspective, simplicity could be seen as an 'indubitable sign' of methodical commitment to the vocation of a chosen individual for his community, who is to make the world a place of God's grace and thus of humanity's welfare. Simplicity would even be one of the consequences of Pietist's logocentrism, focusing on the word. Logocentrism, on the other hand, is part of a culture of self-critical intertextuality: relating one's action and, as a writer, one's text, to what has been already written by inspired Christians and in the Bible to reassure oneself that the way taken is the way of grace, as these models had already proven to be righteous. Intertextuality as a consequence of logocentrism would even lead to a tension between collectivism and individualism, that is, the question of how to relate one's own biography to the sanctioned models of live stories. Finally, and consequently, there is a specific relation to the world that could be described as nostalgic: Pietists never wanted to create a new church, but just regain the original path of Christian belief. There was thus a profound element of nostalgia inherent in Pietist practice, a longing for a happy state that was lost long ago, but hoped for in a future of a coming heavenly Jerusalem. I will discuss the notion of nostalgia in more detail in the next section.

Reconfiguring Childhood: Pietist Nostalgia As (Auto-)Biographical Utopia

What then is Pietist nostalgia in Scandinavian literature after 1945? Let us start with a telling example. The Swedish comedian and writer Jonas Gardell introduces his successful book *Om Gud* (*About God*, 2003) with an autobiographical note where he starts with a surprising genealogy. He tells his reader that '[j]ag är uppfostrad av mama i Enebyberg och av Fader Vår som är i himmelen. Jag helgades i bägges namn, och båda var medvetna om den andras existens' ('I was brought up by my mother in Enebyberg and by Our Father who is in heaven. I have been sanctified in both their names, and they knew of each other's existence').¹⁵ In this simple, innocent-looking assertion, Gardell skillfully combines individual and collective biography, profane and religious genealogy, autobiography and biblical intertext, here being the Lord's Prayer. In order to explain why he would write a book on the different figures of God that are used in the Bible, he transforms the metaphysical quest for God into a question of spiritual genealogy. God is here not primarily a matter of faith, but a question of individual origin — or rather of a childhood that is gone. As early as this first sentence, he thus uses many of the enumerated techniques and aspects that I mentioned above.

The God of his childhood was, as Gardell tells us some lines later in the text, a figure of unconditional love; a figure that, however, was questioned in his adolescence:

¹⁵ Jonas Gardell, *Om Gud* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2003), p. 7. Translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

jag var lycklig med Gud och Gud var nöjd med mig, hans ivrige lille lärjunge. Kristus var uppstånden, ja, han var sannerligen uppstånden.

Tills jag blev äldre och förstod att Gud kanske inte var så nöjd med mig trots allt, och Kristus var måhända uppstånden, men det enkla faktumet att han var uppstånden räckte inte på långt när för att rädda mig till något evigt liv.¹⁶

[I was happy with God and God was happy with me, his eager little disciple. Christ is risen, yes, he is risen indeed. Until I got older and realized that God might not be so happy with me after all, and Christ may have been risen, but the simple fact that he was risen was not long enough to save me from eternal life.]

As a child, Gardell saw himself as a disciple of Christ, believing with all his heart in the message of Easter that is quoted *en passant*. When becoming adult, however, some Christian people told Gardell that he was not as God wanted him to be, that he was not as he should be as a true son of God. He had perhaps become something else than he believed he had to be, although Gardell felt the entire time 'samma närvaro av samma Gud som när jag var barn' ('the same presence of the same God as when I was a child').¹⁷

The relation to his Father God thus becomes problematic in a puberty crisis. He has to leave home and his father, but not because his father rejected him, but other people, society, told him of his father being unsatisfied, creating a tension between the collective and the individual. The distance to his father is caused by intermediaries, not by the father himself. How to know then whether the intermediaries are right? He has to ask his father directly, and consequently, the quest to understand God undertaken in his book finds itself in good Protestant tradition, without intermediaries, respecting implicitly without mentioning the Lutheran principle of *solo scriptura* (by scripture alone), taken into its radical form of Pietist demand of self-education and self-examination guided by God's own word. In reading the Bible critically, he wants to return to God's protection, to become a respected and thus elected child again. And of course, he succeeds, or at least provisionally, as he finds in the last pages an explanation for the many images and representations of God that exist and are advanced by the many intermediaries, and which does not contradict for him the existence of his childhood's God. Consequently, the book ends with an evocation of his childhood's room with his mother praying with him to his father God. Gardell's God thus appears to be part of a lost time, which one can only nostalgically long for, without being fully able to return to it. According to Gardell, however, this God is too important for him to abandon, as he had shared the responsibility for his upbringing with his mother. His interest in God is in part explained by his respect and love for his parents. Remarkably, his biological father is not even mentioned in a footnote.

The theme of the child of a father or a mother in heaven is quite common in the literature of my corpus. In P. O. Enquist's autobiography *Ett annat liv* (*A Different Life*, 2008), for example, the child grows up with his mother, the father having died at an early age. Like Gardell, Enquist engages in an almost lifelong dialogue with his father in heaven that he calls 'Välgöraren' ('benefactor'), explicitly, because God and Jesus do not respond to his

¹⁶ Gardell, *Om Gud*, p. 8.

¹⁷ Gardell, *Om Gud*, p. 8.

prayers, but his father in heaven does and is always present in need — that is, as a substitute for Jesus. In *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* (*Captain Nemo's Library*, 1991), a similar 'välgörare' is identified with Captain Nemo, as neither Jesus nor the protagonist's (uncertain, perhaps dead) father is present. In Tunström's *Juloratoriet* (*Christmas Oratorio*, 1983), the mother dies in the first pages, but stays an ever-present wife and a dialogue partner for the father and indirectly for her son. Victor, the grandson who will stage Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* as the fulfilment of his grandmother's wish, is even more connected to Jesus, as Anita Vargas has shown, being staged as the son of (almost) a virgin, growing up with only God as his father, his earthly father being long ignored.¹⁸ The virtual presence of the physically absent father or mother figure recalls the Pietist claim of an intimate dialogue with God and his son; in the inner dialogue with the absent father, the bygone world becomes a guide for the future plans.

The relationship to Pietist practice is, however, not straightforward in any of the texts: in Gardell's text, the Gardell is prevented from taking part in the Last Supper, because he is said not to be a true Christian, as radical Pietist would say in such cases. In writing the book, Gardell shows that he in fact is a good Christian, perhaps even a better Christian than those who refused to admit him to the Last Supper. In demonstrating his profound knowledge of the Bible throughout the book, he proves even his own righteous intertextual relation to it, inscribing himself in the philological humanist Pietistic tradition which can be traced, for example, to the Halle Pietism, as mentioned above.

Enquist's autobiography *Ett annat liv* is a more complicated case in question, as he is not looking for God as Gardell is, but self-examining his own life and whether it was righteous or not — not in facing God, but himself and his own internalized ethics. He implicitly asks all through his novel: When did I leave the way of the righteous? Was it when I left the belief of my childhood? No, the moment is without doubt when he leaves his family for another woman and gets addicted to alcohol. It is the 'dark life' as an alcoholic that is the turning point of the book, and the narration is accomplished by abandoning alcohol through a retreat in a rehabilitation centre and thorough self-examination by writing a novel about his family. He has now entered, as the title of the book suggests, a different life (*Ett annat liv*), where he can come home at last, not to his former or present wife, but to his mother and lost, but ever-present father, the benefactor (*välgöraren*). It is a work of confession that turns into a story of conversion. Through admitting to himself and to the implied, anonymous reader — who in some way here takes the place of God — that he has left the way of the righteous, the narrator undertakes the work of understanding the truth about himself. It is not the work incited by the intervention of doctors, but the result of an inner process. The inner process is enacted through a basically nostalgic longing, as it is triggered through the remembrance of the lost world of a childhood.

Tunström's *Juloratoriet* (*Christmas Oratorio*, 1983), on the other hand, never directly discusses questions of faith. Its main interest is to tell the history of three generations of a family that revolves around loss and imaginative presence of family members in the small town of Sunne, albeit also connected to destinies in the United States and New

18 Anita Vargas, 'Myten som livstydningssmodell. Figurala kompositionsprinciper i Göran Tunströms *Juloratoriet*', *Tidskrift för litteraturvetenskap*, 31.3 (2002), 47–54 (pp. 49–50).

Zealand and, most importantly, to music, especially that of Bach. The church is merely only a building of remembrance via the surrounding graves and the location where Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* will be staged. In this narrative, music has universally replaced God as a major reference of metaphysical happiness. In his search for the right way in life, the young Sidner does not look for pietistic models, but in his school essays he deals with the Bach family as the noblest example of a righteous life. Art here becomes a sphere that is connected to practices that are traditionally used in Pietist contexts, transforming the relation to art into what could be called an art religion.¹⁹ This connection between music and religion is enforced by the narrative through at least two major endings. Firstly, Sidner, looking for his lost and dead father in New Zealand, becomes church organist in a newly founded congregation; it is here where he marries his father's second love and becomes happy in fulfilling his lost father's dream on the other opposite side of the planet. Secondly, Victor is staging Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* in the small town's church, fulfilling the project of his grandmother. Accomplishing a lost family member's call seems to be a guarantee for success and happiness in life.

In all the books, a specific chronotope, a unit of time and place, represents the object of nostalgia. Gardell takes care to evoke his childhood not only as a moment in time, but he even locates it as the place of Enebyberg, turning the small town into a paradoxical chronotope of a utopian state beyond time and space. In Enquist's *Ett annat liv* and *Kapten Nemos bibliotek*, the green house of childhood in Hjöggböle in northern Sweden becomes a chronotope in much a similar way — as does Sunne in Tunström's *Juloratoriet* and many of his other books. In doing so, the memory of childhood-Enebyberg / Hjöggböle / Sunne is in opposition with time, creating a utopian state of stability, and it becomes stable through linking it to biblical intertexts.

It is proposed that these utopian chronotopes are to be read as representations of a collective *lieu de mémoire* (site of memory), shared with the reader, as the narrators evoke their childhoods as paradigmatic for numerous Swedish childhoods. In fact, Gardell does not mention that he actually passed his childhood in a very specific branch of Christian Protestant, Baptism,²⁰ that is, one of the many Nordic revival movements that accompanied the societies of Northern Europe on their way to modernity, because he wants the reader to identify with his or her own experiences. Enquist tells his reader of the very righteous and implicitly Pietist belief of his mother, but without naming the exact branch. The writers suppose — and the success of their books seem to prove them right — that their experiences are representative of many of their reader's own stories. The narratives can be read paradigmatically as a commonly shared experience even outside the Baptist and Pietist milieus; their heavenly Father is a figure that in some way or other for many readers

19 See, for example, Heinrich Detering, 'Was ist Kunstreligion? Systematische und historische Bemerkungen', in *Kunstreligion: ein ästhetisches Konzept der Moderne in seiner historischen Entfaltung. Band 1, der Ursprung des Konzepts um 1800*, ed. by Albert Meier, Alessandro Costazza, and Gérard Laudin (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2011), pp. 11–27; Stefania Sbarra, 'Das Erlösende in der Poesie / Eine Parallele zwischen Zinzendorf und Goethe', in *Kunstreligion: ein ästhetisches Konzept der Moderne in seiner historischen Entfaltung. Band 1, der Ursprung des Konzepts um 1800*, ed. by Albert Meier, Alessandro Costazza, and Gérard Laudin (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2011), pp. 44–58.

20 There is a small exception, though, when he remembers a line that he sung in his childhood's 'baptistkyrka' ('Baptist church'): Gardell, *Om Gud*, p. 274.

dominated childhood formation (*bildning*) in twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Sweden.

These very individualized stories of coming home after having been forced to leave a chronotope of a lost childhood — by unhappiness as in Tunström, by puberty as in Gardell, or after being lost to alcohol as in Enquist — intentionally follow the plot of many biblical narratives, for example, the expulsion from Paradise or the parable of the prodigal son, without, however, identifying with them closely. Allusions to biblical or other Christian texts and practices seem to be an important element in the structuring of the texts and the narrative Ego. It is striking how Gardell, Enquist, and Tunström implicitly write their stories near the story of Jesus, without identifying with him fully: Gardell and Enquist are the son of God or a Jesus-like figure and an earthly mother, albeit not a virgin, and as Jesus and later Luther, they seek a way to be with their fathers directly, without an intermediary other than prayer and the main media of God, the Bible. In Tunström's *Juloratoriet*, the media are letters and music, particularly the collective singing of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, the story of the birth of God's son.

It seems important to me that these intertextual allusions are merely reminiscences of elements of Protestant and Pietist faith, but not an attempt at restoring, retelling the biblical narrations in a traditional way. It is an open-minded, reflective nostalgia, interested in 'details, not symbols',²¹ as Svetlana Boym would put it in her above-mentioned study. Gardell tells his reader that his quest for God is the quest of a believing Christian, but it is not missionary nor exclusive, as we have seen. Enquist or Tunström never suggest that their protagonists are believers. Their narratives should thus rather be qualified as *reflective nostalgia*, according to Boym's terminology, opposed to *restorative nostalgia*. The latter, restorative nostalgia, is

at core of recent national and religious revivals; it knows two main plots — the return to the origins and the conspiracy. Reflective nostalgia does not follow a single plot but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones; it loves details, not symbols. At best, reflective nostalgia can present an ethical and creative challenge, not merely a pretext for midnight melancholias. This typology of nostalgia allows us to distinguish between national memory that is based on a single plot of national identity, and social memory, which consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define the individual memory.²²

Theoretically, Pietist nostalgia could be of both sorts described by Boym, restorative and reflective. However, in most of the cases that will interest me here, the nostalgic approach seems often to belong to a third category that is transformative nostalgia. This is a form of reflective nostalgia that seeks consciously to transform what has gone into something different, new, living. In fact, Pietist nostalgia, as I want to define it here, is often an attempt at transferring the lost world of Pietist community, rites, and belief into a new, aesthetic sphere, not as an act of reconstructing the old, but transforming it to something useful in modern and postmodern worlds. This is evident in Enquist's book, as the aim of

21 Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, p. xviii.

22 Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, p. xviii.

narration is to provoke in his reader the experience of aesthetic epiphany as a result of a good, astonishing reconfiguration of desperate details of life. It is even more apparent in Tunström's *Juloratoriet* where the performance of Bach's *Christmas Oratio* is the elevated fulfilment of the thriving protagonists and thereby transforms the lost experience of God into the transcended sphere of aesthetic experience, of what Hugo Friedrich called '*leere Transzendenz*' ('empty transcendence').²³

The Notion of Pietist Nostalgia and Karen Blixen / Isak Dinesen's *Babette's Feast*

Transformation, however, is in itself an important element of Pietist thought and practice, a transformation that is caused by the lived experience of the presence of God, causing a fundamental conversion to the real belief. At least since Francke at the turn of the seventeenth century, a Pietist should have a datable experience of the presence of God, transforming him from a learned or cultural Christian to a real Christian, living in sincerity and truth.²⁴ We have seen some of these moments in Enquist's, Gardell's, and Tunström's work, where the narrative quest for understanding ends into a provisional state of fulfilment and aesthetic access to a form of empty transcendence. The perhaps most canonical version of this narrative endeavour, however, might be found in the work of Karen Blixen, that takes its seductive force, as Aage Henriksen once write, from 'the empty room between art and church.'²⁵

The work of Karen Blixen, known to the English-speaking world under the penname of Isak Dinesen, is a paradigmatic example not only of reception and transformation of Pietist ideas and aesthetic practices, but also, and perhaps even more, of nostalgia. Many of her works can be described as attempts at bridging the distance between now and a lost and far-away world by the means of art. The famous opening line of her book *Out of Africa* is a well-known case in point. 'I had a farm in Africa, at the foot of the Ngong Hills', she writes, reflecting the lost world of aristocratic colonialism as a starting point for an artistic rendering of a European utopia of Africa. In other works, Pietist elements play a similar role, notably in her collection *Anecdotes of Destiny* (1950). The five stories of the collection treat the power of imagination, of stories, theatre, and art. Religion is a subtext in all of them; in the first three stories, it plays a dominant role: the first one exploring an oriental Islamic world, the two others Pietist Norway. All of the five stories take place in a time that had already passed at the time of narration. Perhaps the best-known story from this collection is *Babette's Feast*, which in many ways explores what aesthetic Pietist nostalgia might mean at its best.

Babette's Feast tells the most improbable story of a renowned French cook working for two elder Pietist sisters who live an ascetic live and of a most luxurious dinner that



23 Hugo Friedrich, *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik von d. Mitte d. 19. bis zur Mitte d. 20. Jh.* (Hamburg [i.e. Reinbek]: Rowohlt, 1981), pp. 20, 48-49, 61-64.

24 Shantz, *Introduction to German Pietism*, p. 138.

25 Aage Henriksen, 'Der leere Raum zwischen Kunst und Kirche', in *Blixen, Christensen und andere dänische Dichterinnen*, ed. by Bodil Wamberg (Münster: Kleinheinrich, 1988), pp. 53-65.

she organizes for the birthday of the two women's father, the founder of a Pietist sect that renounces all earthly pleasures in order to prepare oneself for the New Jerusalem to come. The narrated world of *Babette's Feast* is, however, held at distance by the narrator in both space and time. The story takes place in Norway, in 'a fjord — a long narrow arm of the sea between tall mountains — named Berlevaag Fjord'.²⁶ From the outset, the setting is exotic enough to make it a world of what could be called the familiar Other: it is part of the Nordic realm of the narrator, but situated at its outermost margins in a landscape that is of no resemblance to anything one might encounter in Denmark or Sweden or in most other parts of Europe. In fact, any reader interested in maps would discover Berlevaag in one of the northernmost fjords of Norway. It is a rural world, far from urbanization, a world of peasants and fishermen, and of a noble woman from the Loewenhielm family; it is thus in some way a premodern, still feudal world, even if the noble elder lady is depicted as a pious member of the community. It takes place, however, not at the time of the reader, but 'sixty-five years ago',²⁷ that is, in the middle of the 1880s in relation to the publication date. Berlevaag is thus a chronotope of a far-away world that has long disappeared, which is visited by the narrator and his ally, the reader; the narration is informed by care and benevolence towards its object, preparing a utopian aesthetic elevation as the ultimate aim of the story, turning it hence into an object of nostalgia.

As mentioned above, the story develops around some moments in the life of a small 'pious ecclesiastic party or sect, which was known and looked up to in all the country of Norway', founded by the father of the two elderly sisters. However, their father has long been dead, and his disciples have become 'somewhat querulous and quarrelsome, so that sad little schisms would arise in the congregation. But they still gathered together to read and interpret the Word'.²⁸ The narrated world is hence a world that has left its idyllic status of Pietist salvation; the relation of the state of the congregation to its ideal is thus of nostalgic nature as well. The ideal spiritual world evoked is thus doubly at a timely distance from the reader: it is already only memory for the protagonists who in turn lived sixty-five years before the act of narration. At the end of the story, however, this lost world will be provisionally restored, both for the community and the reader, and it reveals its utopian element; we will come back to this later.

To be the object of nostalgia, we have noted above, the chronotope has not only to be characterized as being far away, but even familiar, a representation of home. This is probably one reason why Norway is chosen — a place that is imagined as still European, as still Nordic, even if it is located at the margins. More important, however, are other, subtler strategies. The two protagonists are called Philippa and Martine 'after Martin Luther and his friend Philip Melanchthon',²⁹ placing them in the tradition of Lutheran Protestantism and likening the two women to two main heroes of Protestant mythology. Additionally, like in the other examples analysed above, the absent, long-dead father is a central dialogue partner not only with his two daughters, but even with the whole congregation, becoming a surrogate for Jesus and God. Remarkably, the mother is, except for a short mention of

26 Isak Dinesen, *Anecdotes of Destiny and Ehrengard* (New York: Vintage books, 1993), p. 21.

27 Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, p. 21.

28 Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, p. 21.

29 Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, p. 21.

her 'small working-table beneath' the portrait of the father,³⁰ all absent from the text. Like the reference to Jesus and the absent father figures in the case of Jonas Gardell, Per Olov Enquist, and Göran Tunström, these intertextual references are merely an allusion, not a retelling; it is detail, not symbol in the sense Boym put it, an allusion that serves to create familiarity without confining its object to a specific plot.

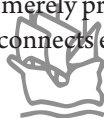
The 'pious party or sect' is said to have been known all over Norway and by that becomes less exotic. When the narrator describes the main principles of the specific sect, they appear to be the same as in the vast majority of Pietist inspired revival movements:

Its members renounced the pleasures of this world, for the earth and all that it held to them was but a kind of illusion, and the true reality was the New Jerusalem toward which they were longing. They swore not at all, but their communication was yea yea and nay nay, and they called one another Brother and Sister.³¹

By means of these different strategies, the specific story of a particular Northern Norwegian Pietist community becomes the representative of the many Pietist movements of the Nordic nineteenth and early twentieth century; it becomes familiar, near to individual and collective memory, but far away like a childhood memory. The world is as such evoked as a perfect object of nostalgia: familiar, but too far away in time and space to be reached.

In the same manner, many other allusions to biblical and Christian, notably Pietist, texts and practices evoked throughout the story are used as a means of resonance, of remembrance, not of direct re-enacting. Babette's relation to the two sisters is described as 'dark Martha in the house of their two fair Marys', alluding to a passage in Luke 10. 38–42. This allusion is followed by a reference to the biblical saying of the cornerstone which 'had almost been refused [but] had become the head-stone of the corner', to be found at numerous places in the New Testament and referring to the Old Testament's Psalms 118. 22.³² A little later, the description of the congregation as 'unshepherded sheep' has to be seen as an allusion to Christ as the good shepherd, etc.³³ None of these intertexts appear to connect to a deeper meaning, they serve nothing other than to create an atmosphere of remembering and associating the well-known and well-esteemed, proving that the protagonists adhere to the biblical model in the Pietist tradition of following God's example and refer to the Bible as the guide to interpretation of one's own life.

The most obvious reference to Christian texts and practices is, however, the feast organized by Babette in memory of the Dean as a re-enactment of the Last Supper. This re-enactment is chatoyant between Jesus's Last Supper before his arrest and crucifixion and the rite of remembrance of community with him celebrated in church, a rite that was crucial for many Pietists; admission to the Last Supper was highly discussed and often reserved only to the seemingly righteous. We have briefly met this problematic when discussing Gardell. As for the Last Supper, there are twelve disciples present at the Dean's birthday dinner, and just as after the death of Jesus, the host is merely present through the act of remembrance. At the same time, however, the narrator connects even other biblical stories to the dinner, for



30 Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, p. 43.

31 Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, p. 21.

32 Both quotations in Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, p. 33.

33 Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, p. 34.

example, the story of the wedding of Cana as well as stories of miracles from the life of the Dean, etc., probably in order to advise against all too easy parallelisms. In the same sense, whilst biblical and Christian intertexts dominate the narration in general, references to other literary universes interfere easily, as, for example, to the Islamic world when citing ‘the black stone tone of Mecca, the Kaaba itself’, or to classical mythology when describing Babette as ‘Phytia upon her tripod.’³⁴ It is thus not an act of restorative, but of reflective nostalgia, of a nostalgia that takes elements to transform them into something new. It is repetition of the known to open up to the unknown, unexpected — that transforms the unexpected and extraordinary to the experience of the familiar, of home.

More important, however, than the intertextual references to other texts are intratextual citations, repetitions, and allusions that structure the narration, as Stefanie von Schnurbein had remarked.³⁵ In fact, several passages are reused two times verbatim by different protagonists or the narrator, once at the beginning and once at the end. For example, of the two sisters it is said twice that ‘for a full minute they could not speak’, first, when hearing about Babette’s lottery winning, and then, when they hear that she had spent the money on the dinner.³⁶ When the General Loewenhielm as a young man meets the Dean, the latter tells him ‘Mercy and Truth, dear brethren, have met together’, and ‘Righteousness and Bliss have kissed one another’. Thirty years later at the dinner, the General opens his speech with the same words, just replacing ‘brethren’ with friends.³⁷ Even more importantly, perhaps, the words that Papin writes to his lost love Philippa: ‘I feel that the grave is not the end. In Paradise I shall hear your voice again. There you will sing, without fears or scruples, as God meant you to sing. There you will be the great artist that God meant you to be. Ah! how you will enchant the angels’. Philippa will use almost the same words to praise Babette in the sentences of the story: ‘I feel, Babette, that this is not the end. In Paradise you will be the great artist that God meant you to be! Ah! [...] how you will enchant the angels!’³⁸

Each of these uses mark a before and an after of a conversion experience, it is the difference between a learned Christian and a true Christian according to the structure of Pietist thought, a difference induced by the experience of conversion, of the experience of God’s presence.³⁹ Of course, in Blixen’s story, the experience of God’s presence is translated into something that we could call the aesthetic experience of truth and eternity. This experience of conversion is most traditionally depicted by the General who first hears some words of wisdom through the Dean and then, thirty years later, repeats them, but now not as an outer knowledge, but as an experience of truth. He is said not to have prepared any speech for the occasion, but that ‘it was as if the whole figure of General Loewenhielm, his breast covered with decorations, were but a mouthpiece for a message which meant to be brought

34 Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, p. 33.

35 See, e.g., Stefanie Von Schnurbein, *Ökonomien des Hungers: Essen und Körper in der skandinavischen Literatur*, Berliner Beiträge zur Skandinavistik, 23 (Berlin: Berlin Nordeuropa-Institut der Humboldt-Universität, 2018), p. 161.

36 Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, pp. 36, 57.

37 Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, pp. 23–24, 52.

38 Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, pp. 30, 59.

39 Horstbøll, ‘Pietism and the Politics of Catechisms’, p. 148.

forth.⁴⁰ It is a higher force that talks through him like through a medium, not like speaking in tongues, but as possessed by a higher will that expresses the truth. In the same way, the silence of the two sisters being confronted with the lottery prize is first informed by an outer understanding of its significance for Babette: they only see the possibility for her to return home; at the end, however, they understand that home for Babette is not Paris, but art. And as such, Philippa's quoting Papin at the end is a means for her to understand fully what Papin was telling her: as a great artist, she has gained entrance to paradise, it is through their art that the happy few true artists may open the view to the eternal hope for themselves and their public. Art and true belief are not contradictions, but two ways to Paradise, that one should follow 'without fears or scruples'. In this moment, Philippa seems to truly understand to 'be the great artist that God meant you to be', taking up another Pietist thought: that each individual has their own call in the world which they have to discover and to realize as God's will.

When we follow this train of thought, we can see that Babette's dinner is structured around the verses of the Dean which are said as grace at the beginning of the dinner, describing Pietist longing for God:

May my food my body maintain,
may my body my soul sustain,
may my soul in deed and word
give thanks for all things to the Lord.⁴¹

The congregation remains first in fear, confronted with the idea of being obliged to stay in the realm of the body, but in fact, all of Babette's art is meant to create food that is sustaining the soul:

The *convives* grew lighter in weight and lighter of heart the more they ate and drank. They no longer needed to remind themselves of their vow. It was, they realised, when man has not only altogether forgotten but has firmly renounced all ideas of food and drink that he eats and drinks in the right spirit.⁴²

The members of the congregation start their conversation by remembering the miracles of the Dean and God, and remember by these means their community in order to confess and forgive the sins of each other and praise at the end, first through the speech of the General, then through many expressions of the leaving congregation "Bless you, bless you, bless you", like an echo of the harmony of the spheres rang to all sides,⁴³ and finally through the last words of Philippa praising Babette's art as a gift from God. The artist becomes as such the preacher, the 'mouthpiece' of eternity. When she performs her art, she is no longer herself, she is acting by a greater will; it is in this way we have to understand Papin's regret that it was not him who kissed Philippa, but Don Giovanni. And this is why Babette is identified, as noted above, as the Greek 'Phytia upon her tripod' as a seeress of the gods' will.



40 Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, p. 52.

41 Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, p. 48.

42 Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, p. 50.

43 Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, p. 55.

However, the most profound incentive of all action, of all will, and all deed in the story is the motif of love. When the narrator sets up to explain why Babette is living in exile in Norway, he tells us that ‘the true reason for Babette’s presence in the two sisters’ house was to be found further back in time and deeper down in the domain of human hearts.’⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the narrator does not begin with the story of Papin, which would be the practical reason for Babette’s coming to Berlevaag, but of the encounter of the young Loewenhielm with Martine that would inspire the two of them to eternal, heavenly love, which was never ‘touched by the flames of this world’,⁴⁵ but fulfilled itself over the course of Babette’s dinner. Likewise, Papin, as an artist, has encountered love for Philippa in the sphere of art, which is thereby elevated to eternity. And finally, the dinner itself is defined as ‘a love-affair of the noble and romantic category in which one no longer distinguishes between bodily and spiritual appetite or satiety’,⁴⁶ as Loewenhielm remembers Colonel Galliffet to have declared. Furthermore, this spiritual love as the basic principle is perhaps the most significant element in the narrative universe inherited from Pietism. For example, Pontoppidan’s widely used catechism declared that the first of the Ten Commandments talks about the ‘love to God’, and this love to God should express itself as a love to oneself and ‘to our fellow man’, because this love ‘is a desire implanted in Man by God to make possible his true welfare and salvation.’⁴⁷

In Blixen’s *Babette’s Feast*, many elements of Pietist practice and belief are thus reused and put forward in a utopian manner, celebrating the possibility of an aesthetic epiphany as a means of an (unstable) experience of fulfillment. Just as in the other texts discussed above, this reconfiguration is done in a way that creates something new, detached from religious belief in a narrow sense. It is nostalgic in the same manner, as all of the texts studied start with a world, a chronotope, that has lost its ideal state through the death of father figures (and one mother), a state that is longed for and that is regained in a productive, aesthetically transformed manner at the end of the narrations. Inter- and intratextuality in a strict sense, that is, the conscious reuse of words, has been noted as an important narrative means, being an expression of logocentrism as a significant part of aesthetics. This reuse of texts refers here and often to attempts at following renowned role models, as when the general quotes the Dean, or Sidner in Tunström’s *Juloratoriet* re-enacts his dead father’s journey and Gardell and Enquist mirror themselves in Jesus as the son of God. Profane aesthetic moments of epiphany have been noted throughout and can be described as variants of the datable conversion experience of Pietists. None of the authors studied wants to regain the state of belief of childhood (with perhaps the uncertain exception of Gardell), but all of them seek a utopia of liberation in the act of narrative art itself.

44 Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, p. 22.

45 Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, p. 23.

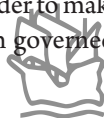
46 Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, p. 51.

47 Horstbøll, ‘Pietism and the Politics of Catechisms’, p. 150.

Perspectives

In another *Anecdote of Destiny*, ‘The Tempest’, the protagonists are caught in a similar way in the structuring force of intertextual references, or rather, text passages of role models to follow. A theatre group wants to stage Shakespeare’s *Tempest* in several towns in Norway, but on their way to Kristiansand in southern Norway, they find themselves caught in a violent storm. In this situation of stress and struggle for life, the female actor playing Ariel falls into the role of the Shakespearean Ariel and, through the courage of the figure, saves the ship and crew. When they land, she is celebrated as a hero by the city and the rich shipowner and his wife, a Pietist merchant and his wife, ‘godfearing folk, their house was the most decorous in the town and the most charitable to the poor.’⁴⁸ However, her act is understood rather in the context of Christian role models of self-sacrifice. She accepts the veneration with surprise, but struggles with the interpretation. In the end, she leaves the rich pious family and her love, the shipowner’s son, because the Bible seems to tell her that her heroic deed which defined her new place in society was done as a work of art, but not as a true act of her conviction, as a re-enactment of a theatre play and not of God’s own word. Also, she grows up with an absent, but through stories ever-present father, and in this way, we can find many of the structuring elements, seen in the foregoing analysis, even in this story. However, the narration does not resolve into a utopian state of an aesthetic epiphany and can thus be read as a counter-piece to the hope transmitted via *Babette’s Feast*. On the contrary, art and truth appear not to meet. However, this is not the fault of the eventual Pietist parents-in-law, but of a practice of reading the Bible too literally. The young actress did not yet understand that truth and art are interconnected, that art is the door to truth.

Above, I defined Pietist nostalgia as the use of motifs, ideas, and narrative elements that can be traced to or are identified by the texts as belonging to the Protestant revival movements of the nineteenth and twentieth century as a means of evoking a chronotope of a bygone world as an aesthetic utopia. Intertextual relations to biblical and Christian texts and practices are thus a central element of this type of nostalgia, as the texts do not seek to re-establish the bygone world per se, but to reuse some of its elements. It would be simple to add works of major, canonized authors that could be analysed in this way. To quote but some names, we can think of Pär Lagerkvist’s later work (*Ahasverus död, Pilgrim på havet, Det heliga landet* (1960–1964)), Kerstin Ekman’s *Kvinnor och Staden* (1974–1983), Torgny Lindgren’s works such as *Ormens väg på hälleberget* (1982), *Legender* (1986) or *Gustav Dorés bible* (2005), Edvard Hoem’s *Mors og fars historie* (2005) and *Slättekar i himmelen* (2014), and Jon Fosse’s trilogy *Andvake, Olavs draumar, Kveldsvævd* (2014). This list is far from exhaustive. Much of Scandinavian literature seems to be informed by some kind of Pietist nostalgia, reflecting it in their work through an exciting confrontation in which models of faith are aestheticized in order to make them compatible with (post-)modernist discourse, a discourse that was often governed by the frame narrative of secularization and anti-religious impetus.



⁴⁸ Dinesen, *Anecdotes*, p. 87.

Nevertheless, the question remains: what are the limits of such a definition? How explicit should the reference to the corpus of Pietist and Christian texts be in order to qualify as Pietist nostalgia? Karen Blixen and Enquist were rather explicit when it came to Pietism; Tunström and Gardell rather implicitly quoted this universe, and even less explicit are texts like Ekman's *Kvinnor och staden*. The problem lies in the definition of Pietism itself: its different currents did not define themselves as something new, but as movements of renewal, which ideally should influence all members, parts, and aspects of human societies, and indeed, it did in many aspects of Scandinavian culture, as briefly discussed in the introduction. However, such questions have to be resolved if we want to understand how the relationship to Pietism and Protestantism changes over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first century — will the implicit reference to these universes decrease and be replaced by an aesthetic nostalgia that takes other elements, for example, nationalistic ones? Or will Pietist nostalgia transform in itself? In order to ask these questions, we should redefine and contextualize the reflections of the present chapter in a study of nostalgia in Scandinavian post-World-War-II literature in general. These are studies still to be made.

