

HANNE ØRSSTAVIK

oktober

LITERARY PRIZES:

2007	ASCHEHOUG PRIZE
2004	BRAGE PRIZE (<i>THE PASTOR</i>)
2004	KLASSEKAMPEN LITERARY PRIZE (<i>THE PASTOR</i>)
2002	DOBLOUG PRIZE
2002	AMALIE SKRAM PRIZE
2000	HAVMANN PRIZE (<i>THE TIME THAT IS NEEDED</i>)
2000	OKTOBER PRIZE
1999	P2 LISTENERS' BEST NOVEL PRIZE (<i>AS TRUE AS I AM REAL</i>)
1999	HUNGER PRIZE
1998	TANUM ART GRANT

HANNE ØRSTAVIK

With the publication of the novel *Cut (Hakk)* in 1994, Hanne Ørstavik (b. 1969) embarked on a career that would make her one of the most remarkable and admired authors in Norwegian contemporary literature. Her literary breakthrough came three years later with the publication of *Love (Kjærlighet)*, which in 2006 was voted the 6th best Norwegian book of the last 25 years in a prestigious contest in *Dagbladet*. Since then the author has written several acclaimed and much discussed novels and received a host of literary prizes.

Ørstavik's books arouse strong feelings among readers and critics alike, a fact that greatly contributes to her unique standing. Her works are read and analysed by students of literature at universities in Norway and abroad. The anthology *Openings*, containing essays on Ørstavik's books written by Nordic literary critics and academics, was published in 2008.

Ørstavik's books have been translated into 16 languages to date.

Love

(Kjærlighet)

First published: 1997, 111 pages

Foreign rights sold: Albanian (Skanderbeg), Czech (Doplnek), Danish (Athene), Dutch (De Geus), Finnish (Like), French (Les Allusifs), Hindi (A&A), Hungarian (Scolar Kiado), Polish (Smak Slowa), Russian (Text), Serbian (Stubovi Kulture), Swedish (Alfabeta Anamma)

Vibeke and her son Jon have just moved to a small place in the north of Norway. It's in the middle of the winter, and the day before Jon's birthday. Wanting to give his mother time to prepare a birthday cake, Jon goes out in the dark to sell lottery tickets. Vibeke, on her hand, is fully occupied with her own new-started life. We follow the two individuals on their separate journeys through a cold winter's night.

Love is a compact, intense story about the arm's length relationship between a mother and her child, in which Ørstavik – without any dramatic gestures - manages to address one of the greatest taboos of our age: the self-absorbed mother.



“an extremely well-composed, precisely written, original, not to mention threatening story about the relationship between mother and child”

DAGBLADET

“The book is small in size, a literary triumph and with a content that hits the reader right in the solar plexus”

BERGENS TIDENDE

“Wonderful writing ... Ørstavik writes out these suspenseful hours with a sophisticated nose for language. The tone is quiet, the words are credible, the story is gripping and engaging without degenerating into a tear jerker about broken family ties”

MORGENBLADET

Sample translation from

Love

TRANSLATED FROM THE NORWEGIAN BY MAY-BRIT AKERHOLT
FULL ENGLISH TRANSLATION AVAILABLE

When I grow old we will travel on the train. As far away as we can. Look out the window at cities and seas, talk to people from various lands. Be together all the time. Never arrive.

She gets through three books a week, often four, five. She would have preferred to read all the time, stayed in bed under the duvet with coffee, lots of cigarettes and a warm nightgown. She could have done without the television set, too. I never watch it, she thinks, but it would not have gone down well with Jon.

She swerves to avoid an old woman who weaves her way along the frozen road with a shopping stroller. It is dark, it's the snow banks that droop over the road that block the light, Vibeke thinks. Then she discovers that she has forgotten the headlights and has driven almost all the way home with a dark car. She turns them on.

Jon tries not to blink. He fails. He gets cramps in the muscles around his eyes. He's kneeling in his bed, looking out the window. Everything is silent. He's waiting for Vibeke to come home. He tries to keep his eyes open and still, he stares at the same place outside the window. The snow is at least a metre high. Mice live on the ground, under the snow. They have paths and channels. They visit each other, Jon thinks, perhaps they give each other food.

The sound of the car. When he's waiting for it to come, he can't hear it in his head. I've forgotten it, he thinks. But then it comes, often when he has taken a break from waiting and isn't thinking about it. Then she comes and he recognises the sound, he hears it, with his tummy, it's my tummy that remembers the sound, not me, he thinks, and just after he has heard the car, he sees it, from one corner of his window, her blue car comes around the bend behind the snowdrift down by the road, she makes a turn into their house and drives up the small slope to the front door.

The sound of the engine is loud and totally clear in his room before she turns it off. Then he hears her slam the car door before she opens the front door, he counts the seconds before she closes it again. Same sounds every day.

Vibeke shoves the shopping bags into the hallway and bends down to undo her boot laces. Her hands are swollen

from the cold, the heater in the car is broken. Last week she gave a colleague a lift from the shops, she said she knew someone who repaired things like that cheaply. Vibeke smiles when she thinks about it. She hasn't got a lot of money and she certainly won't spend any of it on the car. As long as it goes she's happy.

She picks up the mail from the table under the mirror. Her shoulders feel a little stiff, just right after an active day, she rolls her shoulders and stretches her neck before she leans her head back and releases an ah.

She's taking her coat off, he thinks, picturing her in the hallway, in front of the mirror, hanging her coat on the peg while she looks at herself. She'll be tired, he thinks. He opens a box of matches and takes out two. He puts a match in each eye-socket to keep his eyelids open to stop himself from blinking. You'll grow out of it, Vibeke says when she's in a good mood. The matches are like thick sticks and makes it difficult to see. He thinks about his train set, it's impossible not to, no matter what he thinks about, a train comes powering into his thoughts, tilting through the bend with its whistle wailing, rushing past. Perhaps he could give her a face massage, he thinks, massage her forehead, cheeks, they've learnt it in physical education, it's supposed to be good for you.

She carries the bags into the kitchen, puts the mail on the table and stacks the food in the fridge, puts a few tins on a shelf. The engineer from the Technical Department, the dark one with the brown eyes, sat opposite her when they presented the Culture Proposal, her first task as newly appointed cultural consultant. She insisted on having a multi-coloured front cover, an inspiring picture by a local artist. She stands at the bench, drinks a glass of water. It had gone really well, people came up to her afterwards and said they were happy to have her there. That it gave them a vision, made them see new possibilities. The brown eyes had smiled at her at various points during the presenta-

tion, at the summing up session he had made a comment that he was extremely interested in an expanded cross-departmental collaboration.

She pushes a strand of hair away from her face, gathers her hair over one shoulder and strokes it, pleased that it has finally grown long.

He hears her steps across the floor above him. Her shoes. Vibeke always wears light shoes inside. Summer shoes with a small heel. He removes the matches. He strikes one against the matchbox, doesn't blow, wants to hold it for as long as it burns. Skirt and lipstick at work. When she comes home, she changes into a grey tracksuit zipped up to the neck. Perhaps she's changing now. It's so soft on the inside, come and feel. She gave him a pair of slippers when they moved here. Came home from work with them, one of the first days, wrapped in floral paper. She threw them to him so he had to catch. Woollen slippers up to his ankles, with leather soles. And a metal clip for fastening. If he doesn't fasten the clip, the slippers clink when he walks.

Vibeke puts the glass of water on the table. She looks out the window, it's dark. The streetlamps are lit, they light up the road between the rows of houses on both sides. To the north, the village street merges with the highway again. It's a kind of circle, she thinks, you can drive into the centre of the village, past the council building and the shops, through built-up areas, turn onto the highway further up, follow it south and drive into the centre of the village again. Most of the houses have living-room windows facing the road. We must do something on holistic architecture. The village is surrounded by forest. She jots down keywords in a notebook: Identity, self-esteem. Aesthetics. Information.

She goes into the living-room. On the sofa is a grey woollen blanket with a pattern of white circles, on the reverse side the blanket is white and the circles are grey.

The book has a waxed cover, it feels pleasant to the touch. She strokes it with her left hand before she opens it.

She reads a few lines. Then she sits with the open book in her lap, leans back, closes her eyes. She pictures faces from work, people who drop into her office, which looks really nice.

Jon stands in the doorway to the living-room and looks at her. He tries not to blink. He wants to ask her about something for his birthday, tomorrow he turns nine. Now he thinks it can wait, she's asleep. A book in her lap. He's used to seeing her like that. A book, the sharp light from the standing lamp. Often she has a lit cigarette in her hand, he usually follows the smoke with his eyes when it curls its way upwards to the ceiling. Her long, dark hair is spread over the back of the chair, some of it hangs over the edge, slowly moving. Stroke my hair, Jon.

He turns and goes into the kitchen, finds a few biscuits in the cupboard. He puts a whole biscuit in his mouth and tries to suck it soft without breaking it.

He goes down to his room again, kneels on his bed. He places the biscuits in a row on the windowsill.

He looks at the snow in front of his window, thinks about all the snow-

flakes that are needed to make a snow bank. He tries to count in his head how many. They learnt about it at school today. They're called snow crystals. None of them are exactly the same. How many could there be in a snowball. Or on the window, in a small piece of snow.

Vibeke opens her eyes. Through the large living-room windows she can see the red tail lights of a car disappearing down the road. In her head she goes through everyone she knows, if it could be one of them. The engineer, she thinks, him perhaps.

She sits up and checks her watch, then she goes into the kitchen and puts some water in a saucepan, chops half an onion. When the water boils she pulls the saucepan aside and puts in the hotdogs, opens the fridge and puts away the rest of the onion. She turns on the radio. There is an interview program on, she doesn't listen to what they

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talk about. The exchange of voices creates a kind of melody. She tidies away a used plate from the table. It has crumbs along the edges, with a dash of milk in the bottom. She's still wearing her short skirt, it's old, but it moves so softly against her thighs and bottom. The thin stockings are a luxury she allows herself. Most people dress according to the weather. Thick tights, and an extra pair they take off in the bathroom when they arrive. Life's too short, she thinks, not to look nice. She would rather be cold.

She rinses the plate under the tap, scrapes it with the brush to loosen some of the crumbs that are stuck. Jon usually has something to eat when he gets home from school. Biscuits or cornflakes. He often turns on the radio while he eats, and forgets to turn it off. Sometimes she has arrived home from work and heard low voices from the kitchen, thinking there was someone there.

The interview program is over, they're playing a song and she knows the band is famous, she knows that she knows the name, but for the moment she can't think of it. She feels the longing for a good book, a really thick one, of the kind that seem stronger and more real than life itself. I deserve it, she thinks, after my effort at work and everything.

Jon sits down. His bed is right next to the heater beneath the window. When he lies in bed he can feel the heat along one side of his body. At the head-board is a shelf painted blue with some things on it, including magazines, a roll of tape, a torch and a water pistol. He pushes a button on the radio that stands on the shelf and turns the dial until he finds some music. He tries to distinguish the different instruments from each other. Airy guitars, he thinks, because he has heard someone say that. Airy guitars.

He lies down on his bed and closes his eyes. He imagines that when he thinks about nothing it must be totally dark inside his head; like in a large room when the lights are turned off.

She suddenly remembers what the band is called. Of course, she thinks. A scene from an end-of-exam party: another student, younger than her, with a ponytail, they had danced to just this song; he had been rubbing his hips rhythmically against her bum in a way which, strictly speaking, is pretty vulgar. She smiles.

She gets a bag of hot dog buns from a drawer and a fork to fish out the hotdogs with. She puts her head into the hall and calls Jon. Finds a potholder for the saucepan, puts it on the table. She feels like lighting a candle, she looks in

the drawer but she seems to have forgotten to buy some. What is holding him up. She calls again, she walks down the stairs and goes to his room.

He dreams that he's playing basketball with some friends, it's sunny and warm and he shoots many goals, he's happy and runs up to the house and inside to tell Vibeke. She comes slowly out from the kitchen. He begins to talk to her, but she smiles so strangely that he turns to go downstairs to his room. Just around the corner on top of the stairs stands a woman who looks exactly like Vibeke. She whispers to him in a low voice as if she's trying to lure him to her. When he's about to lean towards her, a third woman comes up the stairs. Perhaps she's Vibeke. He stands stock still.

He's woken up by Vibeke standing in the doorway, there is light around her, she tells him dinner's ready.

Jon walks behind her up the stairs, they sit down at the kitchen table. Vibeke turns off the radio. She looks through the mail while they eat. Jon can see advertising brochures from a furniture retailer and big chain of grocery shops. There is one leaflet with the heading: Fair Ground. He asks what else it says. Vibeke reads out loud that a Fair Ground has arrived at the sports ground next to the council building, they have a UFO ride and an Astro Spinner. A Fair Ground isn't something for you, Jon, she says. Jon asks if they have 3D games. Vibeke has no idea what that is. Space-ship machines and things like that, Jon says, computer games where you sit inside a machine and shoot yourself into space and have to overcome obstacles. Vibeke reads through the leaflet once more, she can't find anything about it.

He looks at her, she continues to eat and turn pages, he can hear a little click when she bites through the taut skin of the hotdog.

Jon makes himself another hotdog. They pile up in his stomach like logs in the forest, you can always squeeze in just one more.

There is a path into the forest, from a secret, forgotten place

It is important to find the path, then his body will join the race

Past trees and flowers and tufts of grass, into a castle so old

In the castle sit three madams, mighty magnificent in gold

They sit and wait for the prince, wonder will he arrive soon
They sing a song while they wait, swaying to the mournful tune

What does it look like in there, Vibeke would always ask when the princess has fled into a foreign castle. Tell me, Jon. He remembers sitting on her lap describing large, empty rooms with open windows and long, light curtains. Lit lamps and soft carpets. You know what it should be like, don't you Jon, she used to say. I'm so fond of large, light rooms.

He looks out the window. In the house across the road lives an old man. His driveway isn't cleared of snow, because he doesn't own a car. The old man scrapes a path in the snow with a shovel. When he goes to the shops he uses a kick-sled. It's slow going, Jon has seen him stop and sit on the seat to rest. He hasn't seen him outside the house for the last few days. It must have been too cold. The path is almost buried. The woman from the shop has been there in her little van. She left the engine running while she waded through the snow up to the house. Jon saw her deliver a couple of bags through the crack in the door before rushing back to the car on the road.

Vibeke looks at her hand when she reaches for another bun. She has long fingers, her eyes follow the tendons at the back of her hand. The indoor air dries out the skin, the only thing that helps is lanolin, really. And the nails. The hair. The cold dries everything out.

It's not far into town, still it feels like a long time since she was last there. She tries to think when it was. Jon, stop it. A bit more than a week ago. Last Saturday. The bookshop, of course. She and Jon had cake at a smoke-free café. What else. God, what a place, a plastic bakery. This town lacks a café with thought-through design, it's like a house without a proper hallway. Stop it, Jon. Actually, it's been a while since I bought some clothes, she thinks. She could do with a new outfit, she really deserves it the way she worked so hard with the move. Please stop squeezing your eyes shut all the time, Jon, you look like a mouse. She thinks about a slim-line, plain beige skirt she once saw a woman wear at a seminar.

Jon looks at a picture on the wall next to the window. It's an aerial photograph of the village in a black frame. It hung there when they moved in. He looks at it while he eats another hotdog. The houses lie in a row along the road.

The road is an even line. Even if the photograph is old and yellowing, there is no difference between then and now, just that everything was newer when the picture was taken. He tries to figure out who lives in the different houses, but he only knows the ones where some of his school friends live. If he looks at the picture long enough they will come out of the houses and start to move the way they do in cartoons.

One of the boys in his class got a fighter plane kit for his birthday a couple of weeks ago. Jon wants a train. Märklin. He only needs a few parts to start with, a single track and above all, a locomotive.

In his schoolbag is a ticket book for the sports club. When he has finished eating he must go around to the houses he can see in the picture and sell tickets.

Vibeke gets up and tidies away the plates and glasses on the kitchen bench. Jon kneels on his chair, leans over the table, she sees that he tries to skewer the last hotdog with his fork. He tells her a joke he has made up about a man who throws himself out of a window and never hits the ground. She doesn't think his jokes have a point to them. He impales the hotdog, breaks it in two and gives her one half. She smiles. They always eat the last one like that, share it, eat it on its own. Then he rests on his elbows for a bit, as if he's waiting for something. He tells her about a torture photo he has seen in a magazine, a man who hangs just above the floor with a hood over his head. His arms are tied with a rope to a pole, he hangs for such a long time that his arms are almost severed from his body, Jon says. Why don't you just leave, she thinks. Find something to do, play for a while.

– It's nice of you to think about people who are in pain, she says. – If everyone did that perhaps the world would be a little better.

She stretches out her hand and strokes his hair.

– Have you started making friends here?

His hair is thin and soft.

– Jon, she says, – my darling Jon.

She repeats the movement, looks at her hand. She has applied a light beige nail polish with a touch of pink in it, she likes to be discreet at work. She remembers the new set that still must be in her bag, plum, or was it wine; dark, sensual lipstick and nail polish in the same shade. Accessories to match a dark man with brown eyes, she thinks suddenly with a little smile.

Jon finds his schoolbag in the hall. He takes the book of

tickets from the small pocket at the front where he usually keeps his lunchbox. He pulls on an extra pair of socks before he ties the laces on his grey boots. He puts on his parka and his blue scarf. The beanie. He looks in the mirror. He tries to stop it but he can't. He searches the pockets of her coat. Between a few receipts and an old bus ticket he finds some coins. He calls to her that he's leaving.

He opens the front door and stands on the threshold. When he breathes in he can feel in his nose how cold it is.

Jon walks along the side of Vibeke's car. He stops and squeezes the book of tickets between his knees, collects some snow from the top of the car boot and crumples it. But it's impossible to make a ball because the snow is totally dry. He blows it off his mittens, beats his mittens together. It cracks loudly. Sounds become so light when it's cold. Everything becomes light. As if he himself is a bubble of air which at any time can rise into the air and disappear into space.

He takes the book of tickets and continues across the road, up the little scraped path. The snow creaks beneath his boots. An overhang juts out over the old man's front door, beneath it is a stack of firewood. Snow has blown in between the logs. The outdoor light isn't switched on. Jon finds the doorbell in the dark. He pushes the button, but he can't hear any sound. It's so silent, Jon thinks. All of a sudden, the old man opens the door, it happens so fast that Jon is startled.

– Do you want to buy a ticket, he asks and shows him the book. – It's for the sports club.

The old man looks at him, then he looks past him to the road. His eyes move rapidly. It has been a long time since any cars passed. It's too cold for people to be out walking. He waves Jon inside. He closes the front door and walks through another door. Jon stamps the snow from his boots and follows.

He enters a small living-room with a kitchen alcove. On top of the kitchen bench is a small television set. A black and white film is playing, the sound is turned off. The old man walks slowly over to a woodstove and kneels on one leg, he seems a bit stiff. He adds a log. He covers his hand with his sleeve and closes the valve to a thin strip. Then he

turns and smiles to Jon.

– That should do it. Have to make sure it's warm when an old body gets a visitor.

At the window, a rocking chair is slowly swaying back and forth. He must have been sitting there when I rang the bell, Jon thinks. Perhaps he saw me coming.

– The sports club, yes. The man shuffles over to the kitchen bench and pulls out a drawer, asks how many tickets Jon has and what they cost. Jon answers. The old man finds a wallet, says he wants to buy them all. He writes his name in the book, with brackets and the ditto sign on all the numbered slips. It takes time. Jon looks around the room.

On the wall above the rocking chair hang three old portraits in round frames, those old ones that have gone misty around the edges, as if they're about to disappear. A fishing rod is tucked away in the corner. Perhaps it's a fly-fishing rod, he thinks. Last year Vibeke had a boyfriend who wanted to teach Jon fly-fishing. Us boys, he said and

found a map to show him the way, pointed to a river, told him about different deep pools. There, he said, you'll catch a big one there. He looked at Vibeke and smiled. But then he was just gone. Jon had not even heard them argue.

The old man turns to Jon, hands him the book of tickets and a few notes.

– You're new here, are you?

– Yes, we came here four months and three days ago.

Jon puts the money and the tickets in the bag, he's pleased.

– And you're already out and about selling tickets. They know how to put people to work, the sports club.

Jon tells him he has become a member to join the skating team.

The man's hair is totally white, it's long and thin and tousled. His face looks red, Jon thinks, as if he has just woken up.

– Do you want to come and see something, he says.

– What, asks Jon.

He tries not to blink.

– You'll see. I'd almost forgotten all about it, almost totally forgotten.

The man walks to a door, opens it and switches on a

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Satisfying, active.
Balanced.**

light. A bulb screwed directly into the wall lights up. Jon sees a staircase leading down to the basement.

Vibeke goes to the bathroom and looks at herself in the mirror. She can see by the harmony of her expression that she has had a good day. Satisfying, active. Balanced. On the right nostril sparkles a tiny crystal, she winks back. My little lucky star. She grabs a brush and bends forward so the long waves of dark hair reach almost to the floor. First she brushes it carefully to remove the knots, then she uses long, gentle downward strokes. Then she throws her hair back. She wants it to fall like a cloud around her face. She looks in the mirror. It refuses to spring up, it falls in flat stripes around her forehead. I could go to the library, she thinks. She usually saves the library for Saturdays and today is only Wednesday, but she has run out of novels to read. She decides to take a bath first and wash her hair, really spoil herself.

Jon walks behind him down the staircase. It's steep, the old man takes one step at the time, a thick rope serves as a rail. Down in the basement he walks along a hallway. There is a runner of plastic grass on the floor. The smell down there is rank and strange, Jon thinks it smells of earth. The man stops in front of a door at the end of the hallway. He turns to Jon with his hand on the handle.

She undresses while she runs the bath, unfortunately, she has run out of bubble bath. She takes a cotton ball from a container on the wall and removes the old nail polish. When the water reaches the edge she turns off the tap. She steps slowly into the bath, water splashes on the floor, goose bumps spread through her body, her nipples stiffen and her neck tingles. Then she sits down. To lay down in the hot water's a pure blessing, she thinks. Literally. Blessing. She lies still, enjoying every second.

– This is an amusing story, the old man says.

There is a stretcher along one wall, the other wall has shelving from floor to ceiling, full of old wooden crates. It smells of dust and mould. Jon thinks that the man perhaps has a collection of old electric trains; the first in Europe. Suddenly he feels he has to pee. The man walks over to the shelves, pulls a crate in the middle half-way out, puts his hand inside. On a hook by the door hangs a dog leash of

leather and one of metal.

– Look at these, the man says to Jon.

He turns, he's holding a pair of brown skates.

– Handmade. I got them from my father.

The man holds the skates up so Jon can touch them. Jon walks a few steps forward and feels the stiff leather with his fingertips, the skates quiver, the old man's hand is trembling.

– They were a big thing then, he says. – Handmade skates on long iron blades. No one in the village had anything like that. I won the Kalott Race with them, against young boys from Rovanjemi, Utsjok, Neiden and even further inland, Russians. The race took place on a lake called Storevannet. A thousand metres. Before Stalin and all that evil and Hitler and the whole bloody mess. On black ice. That's before the snow falls, when the water freezes to ice.

Vibeke shampoos her hair, moving her hands in circles, like the hairdresser. She closes her eyes to shut out outer stimulants, only wants to be inside her body, feel from inside. She recalls a dream: A man said: "You're so pretty". They were standing at the bottom of a carpeted staircase by some mirrors in golden frames, and there were scarlet doors leading to the toilets. They were at a party, the party

was right at the top of the staircase, that's where the people were, the lights, the voices. Loud music. At the bottom of the staircase it was quiet, the man came out of a door, saw

She could have a party here, ask her colleagues. Break the ice, get a network. She pictures her living-room decorated with lots of candles and flowers.

her and said – You're so pretty. It made her happy, she leant forward to give him a hug and he kissed her carefully on the cheek. Then he walked out through a revolving door, he wore a dark suit and a white shirt. He had no coat, just a thin woollen scarf draped over his shoulders. She was standing there looking at herself in the mirror, smiling. Happy. That's the good part. The rest of the dream is not much fun to remember. Suddenly the party was over. The lights were switched off, the staircase gone. She realised that she was alone in a public toilet, it stank of urine, her feet were cold in their stockings. She walked through the revolving door where the man had left. She came out on a square that was half-way frozen, a street-lamp was shining further away. The square was empty, she walked towards a gate in the wall that she thought might lead to a road.

Oh well, she thinks, at least the beginning was good. A party could be fun. She could have a party here, ask her colleagues. Break the ice, get a network. She pictures her living-room decorated with lots of candles and masses of flowers. Shining eyes and loud laughter. In her living-room. She will make a beautiful, written invitation with a quote from a poem.

She showers the soap off and rinses her hair. The pipes screech when she turns off the water. She pulls the shower curtain aside and looks at her body in the mirror, through a blur of mist. What would they drink from. She doesn't have enough glasses for so many people. She would have to buy some in town on Saturday. She has seen some colourful glasses, even the stem was coloured. But perhaps that would be too fussy. She decides to find some in a good design that are both simple and cheerful.

Jon walks back across the road, home. When he's inside he pulls the door until it's properly shut, ice has formed on the threshold. He pulls off his mittens and drops them in the white basket in the corner. He walks down to his room without taking off his parka, puts down the bag with the book of tickets and the money from the old man. When Jon was about to leave, the man cut him a broad strip of dried meat from a large piece hanging on a hook next to the front door. He puts the strip of meat on his desk.

He stands and looks around his room, at the poster with the outline of the Milky Way and the planets, the blue and green stripes in the wallpaper. He feels relieved now that he has sold all the tickets, he had been dreading doing the rounds with the book. He wonders what he should do. He tries not to blink. He doesn't succeed. He puts the green water pistol in his back pocket and walks up the stairs. He practises drawing his gun as fast as he can in front of the hall mirror.

It's hot wearing his parka inside, he's sweating, but he doesn't want to take it off. He wonders how he looks when he blinks, but of course it's impossible to know that. Perhaps if someone took a picture of him, he would be able to see it in the picture. Vibeke comes naked out of the bathroom with a towel around her hair. He looks at her, then he tries not to look. Oh there you are, Jon, she says, I thought you'd gone out. She continues into the living-room, he can hear her put on a CD, push the buttons, the small pause before she pushes play. It's the same song that she plays

again and again in the mornings before she goes to work. She calls loudly from the living-room as if he is far away: Jon, have you seen my body-lotion?

Jon aims at himself in the mirror. When he draws, he holds the pistol steadily with both hands and presses his elbows against his body. What does a body look like full of holes. He thinks about jelly babies and chocolate cake with light brown cream, not dark like the last party he was at. He sees Vibeke behind him in the mirror, she walks naked out from the kitchen with the bottle of lotion, holding it up smilingly, so he can see that she has found it. She turns into the living-room, turns up the sound. She always stands there applying lotion after her shower in the morning. But she doesn't usually shower at night. He thinks that perhaps she wants to save time on his birthday by getting ready now.

He feels a cold draught now that he stands still. The draught comes into the hallway from the front door. They should have sealed the crack with a rolled-up draught-stopper, the way he has seen it done in other people's houses. He puts his water pistol in his pocket, changes his beanie. Vibeke must be left in peace for the preparations. If he's not at home when she makes the cake it will be more like a real surprise, Jon thinks. He goes outside. Down on the road he regrets that he didn't put on his mittens, but he doesn't go back up to the house again.

The P2 listeners' Best Novel Prize 1999

As True as I Am Real

(Like sant som jeg er virkelig)

First published: 1999, 149 pp

Foreign rights sold: Albanian (Skanderbeg), Czech (Doplnek), Danish (Athene), Dutch (De Geus), Finnish (Like), French (Le Reflet), German (Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag), Hebrew (Schocken), Swedish (Alfabeta Anamma)

Johanne, the narrator in the novel *As True as I am Real* is a young psychology student who lives with her mother. One morning she awakes to find that she has been locked up in her bedroom. Two weeks earlier she has entered her first love-affair. In monologue Johanne recapitulates the last weeks' events, at the same time as the reader is shown how difficult it is to decide what is real, when one's language is not founded in personal emotional experience.



“A stylistically agile, well-proportioned and thematically captivating text which reflects a lot of human experience, whether the reader is a man or a woman.”

GÖTEBORGS-POSTEN, SWEDEN

“*As True as I am Real* is an admirably well crafted novel, technically without blemish. Penetrating in its psychological examination. But the really wonderful thing about the book is that Hanne Ørstavik is confident enough to make a sort of new, but completely opposite version of *Love*. A version where the relation between mother and child isn't characterized by rejection, as in *Love*, but is all-consuming, where the basic theme isn't the state of being locked out, but locked in ... The situation that the novel is built up around is almost brilliant in its simplicity.”

ATLE KITTANG



The Time That Is Needed

(Tiden det tar)

First published: 2000, 229 pp

Foreign rights sold: Danish (Batzler & co.), Dutch (De Geus), Finnish (Like)
Swedish (Alfabeta Anamma)

Signe is 30 years old and has just moved out of the city with her husband and child. Christmas is approaching, and the three of them plan on celebrating alone. But then Signe's parents come visiting, and Signe is confronted with their expectations, and has to face her own past. As well as portraying the life of a 13 year-old in the darkness of the north of Norway, Ørstavik describes an extreme conflict of universal relevance: Whose life do we wish to live?

When first published, *The Time That is Needed* was the Book of the Month in the book club Nye Bøker.

“A beautiful and powerful family novel”

TIJD OPZIJ, HOLLAND

“ masterfully executed ”

NRK P2

“This is very, very good... every line is distinct, vibrating with a sensitivity shunning all sentimentality, and which, thanks to that, moves the reader even more strongly”

DAGBLADET

WINNER OF THE BRAGE PRIZE 2004

The Pastor

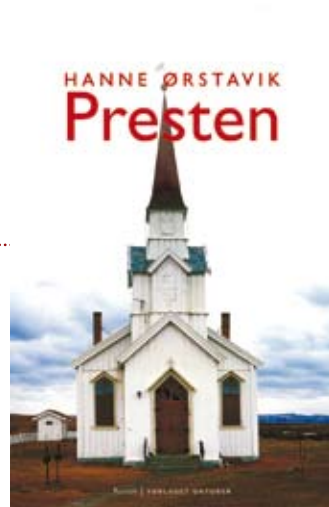
(Presten)

First published: 2004, 234 pp

Foreign rights sold: Danish (Athene), Estonian (Eesti Ramat), Finnish (Like), French (Les Allusifs), German (DVA), Latvian (Apgads Atene), Polish (Slowo), Russian (Text Publishers), Swedish (Kabusa)

Liv is thirty-five years old. A year before the story begins, she left Germany, where she was studying for a PhD in theology, to become a parish priest of a small town in the far north of Norway. The novel opens with a Sunday service, and subsequently follows Liv's life in the next few days, culminating in the funeral she officiates on the following Friday. Liv fills multiple roles and functions in her life; as a priest, a fellow human being and a private person. She is driven by an urge for purpose, meaning and belonging. As a researcher she studied the language of the Bible as a rallying point in the revolt of the Sami people in Kautokeino in 1852, focusing on the question of what it is that gives language its meaning - not only on a semantic level, but also as tone, rhythm and attitude - all the things that shape a language, constituting something larger, something more. Liv's reflections and recollections give the story its impetus and unify its various levels.

In *The Pastor*, Hanne Ørstavik continues the pursuit of knowledge that represents the core of her literary project. In a clear, incisive prose she generates a sense of presence that gives direct access to the novel's ethical and existential universe.



“With great precision, but without being dry, Ørstavik writes out feelings and in an inventive fashion masters both content and form in a novel about searching for the meaning of life.”

LE MONDE, FRANCE

“Off you go – to the bookstore! Norwegian Hanne Ørstavik has written an absolutely outstanding novel about language and reality ... The book succeeds in integrating the plot with the greater, general reflections about language, reality and friendship, without ever becoming artificial or affected.”

DANMARKS RADIO, DENMARK

Sample translation from

The Pastor

TRANSLATED FROM THE NORWEGIAN BY MAY-BRIT AKERHOLT

This is the blood of Christ. I took a sideways step, poured wine into the next small shiny cup. I looked at the bowed heads in front of me, one head after another, one and one and one. And that's how it should be, I thought. Here you can enter and be someone. Here you are chosen, unique. Here you will be seen, here you can stay. You, that included me as well. We.

The altar rail was a beginning. The half-circle was a sign that said there was a larger circle, and a circle beyond that again. And a larger circle still, an infinitely large luminous room. And that we all could be there, together, and separately, each single one and alone. Here. Here you can be. Here you can stay. This is all for you.

There was a moment's silence. As if they were gathered together in a fan here around the half-circle, and that from all the backs in front of me, lines were running into the landscape. Out into the open flatness, out across the mountain, out across the ocean, further out. It didn't end. It continued. They had brought it with them inside. Soon they would stand up, afterwards they would push the doors open and walk out again, scattering.

These people who were kneeling here. As if they said: We tolerate you after all. They may even have forgotten it. I could've gone somewhere else, but I knew that something would have happened there too. Not the same one more time. But something else I could not prevent. Something that would simply happen, and that I afterwards could not be released from, that would be clearly visible in my face.

It was last year, when I had my first church service

here. I stood in the pulpit and looked out at them, those who sat and waited to hear what the new pastor had to say. My sermon was about the prodigal son. He who returns home, and the father who kills the fatted calf, who gives a party for him. And the brother's envy. The party that is given nevertheless. I stood there in my cassock with the light stole over it, the stole Kristiane had made for me, and looked out

at them, wanted them to hear me properly, to open up to it, to understand. That was how I wanted the church to be. A place where we have a party together when someone comes home. I saw it as my mission to keep the church open so it was possible for those who might want it, to come here. Not to me as a person, but to the togetherness, and the quietude, a place which gives a party for them, a place they were received.

That was the subject of my sermon. I talked and talked. I felt I wasn't expressing it properly. I had to say it one more time and one more time. I talked for too long. Stood there swathed in my soft dress and held forth. I kept talking for far too long, almost an hour. We learned during field education that we should preach for fifteen minutes. Don't talk longer, shorter, rather. Because it's not the words they will remember. Yes, a few words, maybe, a turn of phrase they may find useful, something that hits a spot, there and then. But on the whole, they would not remember what you said, they would only remember the event. The experience. So give them an experience. You can do that in fifteen minutes. Never more than twenty minutes, then they drop off.

**These people
who were
kneeling here.
As if they said:
We tolerate you
after all.**

And that was true, it had lasted for too long. I knew it. It was done and I couldn't set it right again.

People got up and left. Even the woman from the parish office left, the woman I had met, who had given me the key to the house, shown me around on that first day, offered me coffee in the office. She stayed for a long time, but finally she too stood up and left. And several others, I didn't know who they were, they got up and left quietly. It was five or six who left. And there weren't that many there to begin with, either.

Every now and then I would wake up and think about it. That too I was ashamed of, that I thought about it. That that's what I thought about and not something else, something more important. But I wanted so badly to reach them. I had arrived here, boxes and bags, all my goods and chattels, everything fitted into the car. I had driven off a good week after Kristiane's funeral.

I found the vacant position for a chaplain on the net and rang, faxed my papers. It had been advertised several times, there were no other applicants. A few days later it was done. So I packed and left, all the way from South-Germany, up through the country, here.

It took a day and a night to drive through the pine forests of Northern Finland, I came to the border, drove along the river, across the mountain and down towards the fjord on the other side. And I had that feeling, when I followed the curving road along the fjord out towards the town, the feeling of coming home. Even if I had never been here before. Home in the landscape, home in the big openness that I had had in my thoughts and seen in my mind. That this is where I wanted to come.

And hence that sermon, hence the words about coming home. Because it was my story that I wanted to be ours, my experience that I wanted to share, to

give, that it might form a kind of common foundation. I wanted it so badly, I wanted it, wanted and wanted. To come to a place where I could say we, a place where that could happen.

And then I ruined it. Even before it got started. I ruined what I wanted and wished for most of all. Again and again. It oozed out of me, the thing that ruined it, it spread itself out from me and made a mess, and pushed all the others aside.

When I came home from the church that day I hung the stole from Kristiane at the back of the wardrobe. I didn't use it again.

And on the night He was betrayed. I stood there and looked out at them, heard my voice in the big room. Out there it had nothing to do with me. I didn't talk for me, but for us. God's body and God's blood. Your sins are forgiven. Go forth, and sin no more. I held my hands out. It was like letting something go, as if something disappeared from me when I did it, when I opened my arms, made this movement with them, forwards. That something just

floated out and away.

That was the kind of year it had been. Everything floated away, every time I opened my hands and held them out, something disappeared, was emptied, something that was not there anymore afterwards.

No, everything didn't float away. It was true that something poured out and was gone, but it was as if there existed a place in there which it was impossible to empty, like an underground spring which just flowed and flowed. Where does it come from? It just trickles forth, seeps out. Is there, is and is.

I stood in front of the altar while we sang the psalm. And there was a kind of peace in singing the words, a restfulness. Soon it would be Easter, soon it would be a year since it happened.

Yes, to come here had to do with Kristiane as well,

I came to the border, drove along the river, across the mountain and down towards the fjord on the other side. And I had that feeling, when I followed the curving road along the fjord out towards the town, the feeling of coming home. Even if I had never been here before.

it was an opposite movement, in a sense, an inversion. Simply and clearly, as if I was a pawn, I had been far down on the map in south Germany, and then I was to go to the very top, here. Opposite, opposite. As if I had been hurled too close to something, too far down, or in, and then it swung out again afterwards. Out towards what? Towards nothing?

I came out of the main entrance, locked it. The door was made of glass, with a leaded frame, so even if it was closed, it was possible to see in. "The church door appears to be almost squeezed in between two angular annexes which stand there like frozen ice-colossuses and give shelter to he who seeks the church." That's what it said in the folder they sent me after I rang and inquired about the position. I looked up at the church. I had never thought of the two white stone towers as ice-colossuses. No, they were two powerful, simple stone towers, with an opening between them where you could see the sky, with a roof over, the kind of roof Lillen had in her Lego box, a triangular block to put on top.

It was blowing. It was always blowing here. I hadn't thought of that when I applied for the job. I could not remove the wind. It was as if there were images inside the wind, inside the feeling of the wind against the face, images that were just in it and appeared.

It was blowing when I met Kristiane. It was outside the convent, on the flat country between Aspenhau and Hartwald, the convent lies out there between the large, scattered trees, there is a wall along the outer edges of the property, but the wall is not enough to keep the wind away. At the door to the convent church, that's where it was, the arched door with all the small clay figures. She stood there in her black soft garments, her green eyes and her hand that held on to the funny hat, she stood there bent backwards looking up at the figures and then there was a figure up there she wanted to touch and she stretched out

her arm, forgot to hold on to her hat, just stretched her arm out to touch the small figure with horns in his forehead and a twisted mouth. And then the hat blew off. Everything took just a second, from the time I opened the door from inside the church and came out and saw her stand there, leaning backwards, and saw how her hand stretched out, the movement towards the figure and the hat that flew off.

I stood there and looked at the church door, looked through the glass in it and into the large room beyond, the wind was blowing cold against my face, my ears, I closed my eyes.

I took a step forward and bent down to pick up the hat for her, but it blew away, and then it blew further and further away and that's how it was, like an old silent movie, we chased the hat around in the convent grounds in the muddy grass beneath the large bare trees between the old houses that stood there, built in stone. We started to laugh, first Kristiane, she laughed her light laughter, and I who had been far away lost inside the convent, I could hear myself

starting to laugh too, and finally the wind took the hat over to a brick wall at the corner of the gate and it was lying there perfectly still. We reached it at the same time. Kristiane picked it up and knocked wet, rotten leaves off it against her knee and put it on her head again, pulled it down a little on her forehead. Then she looked at me and smiled, with her mouth closed. Looked at me and smiled up at me beneath her hat, because she was small, Kristiane. And then she started to laugh again, an almost childish laughter, light and cheeky, she looked straight at me and I saw an openness in her eyes, she seemed so happy.

It wanted to, she said, it just wanted to go and play for a while. Spielen. But now it has to stay still. Winnifred, she said in a strict voice and glanced up at the hat, du bleibst da.

I got a lift with her back into town. Sat next to her in the front seat of the black, rattling van with its

**It was blowing.
It was always
blowing here. I
hadn't thought
of that when I
applied for the
job.**

logo of a mask. Kristiane, 41 years old, puppeteer. I, Liv, 34, scholarship student of theology.

It had been so easy. So easy to meet her, so easy to be together, like that. Sitting in the car, the drone of the motor, looking out at the acres of industry we passed, enormous they were, flat, dark, empty, and the large trees that were lined up in rows or clustered together, leaf-less, the black trunks.

Easy. I was so heavy myself, and then all I saw in her was the lightness, because I needed it. Was that how it was? And then I didn't understand that the lightness in her was turned up too high, like the sun in a film that becomes totally white before the picture disappears?

I opened my eyes, in front of me was the church where I was pastor, where I had lived for almost a year, I tried to concentrate about that, that this is where I am now, think simple thoughts, clear. This was quite a new church, built after the war, like almost everything in this town. I turned around, from the little square in front of the church I could see the whole town centre.

From the church, a main axis stretched down the stairs and the small hill with the war monument, along the main street with the fisheries and the shops and all the way to the fishmeal factory out on the island. Behind the island was the water. The ocean out towards the left, the fjord going in on the right. Straight ahead was the other side of the fjord, a flat stripe of land, beyond that again was Russia.

In the Middle Ages the townspeople lived on the island. Now the town was on the mainland, with a small bridge across, not more than a few metres. The island provided shelter, against the wind and the storms. And against the view. It was typical of someone from the south to think like that.

The other axis, lengthways, was created by the road from the mainland out towards the fjord straight through the town and further out till there was no fjord any longer, only ocean.

They had drawn up the town according to these lines, the cross-wise line and the length-wise line, and added parallel lines so it became a grid. After the war, they had drawn the roads and then they had started to re-build, there were photos from it hanging in the hall at the back of the church, in the sacristy, next to the offices. Black and white photos of men in working clothes carrying sacks of cement, there were stacks of planks, scaffolds, someone with a helmet on his head pointing something out, and the tyre tracks in the road that was just sand, clear tyre tracks from trucks, and a crane.

I stood there with the church behind me and looked out, breathed the air, it was so light. So clear, that's what it felt like, the sky was clear as well and it was so bright. It was blowing and it was sunny.

Yes, it was blowing and finally it was bright, yes, that's where I should think, in the brightness, think on the surface, on top. Leave the other stuff alone for a while yet, leave it there.

But it didn't work, she was here, too, Kristiane. It was as if each plane had holes and connections down to the next, to what was lying

there, beneath, inside me, pouring out. In the middle of this brightness, this lightness, in the wind, in this little town, I could turn around and she would be here, in front of this church door, in the same black garments, in the same hat that she had to hold on to, one arm lifted, at an angle. And I could see her like that, and talk to her and touch her and she would be alive again, laugh and be real.

No, Liv. It's just not like that. Certain things are done and cannot be undone. Certain things are over and done with. And you can scream and pull and tear at it, but it won't come back.

What is it, this lightness in her that became too light? Or the heaviness disguised as lightness, and I just didn't see it? Thus everything in her appeared doubled, inverted. Turned inside out? Like her teeth, I didn't see them either at first, not before we sat in

Easy. I was so heavy myself, and then all I saw in her was lightness, because I needed it. Was that how it was?

the car on the way back from the convent, and I saw her face in profile. Her eyes were on the road ahead, her mouth was half open, then she started to laugh at something, she laughed a lot, she could start laughing out of the blue, her laughter rang out, and I saw that her teeth were lumped together, they had grown in front of and at the back of each other, aslant. There were too many of them, and they had funny shapes, they were not just flat, some of them were pointed and narrow, too, like small towers.

I saw that the snow had melted on the large stone slabs, some spots were covered in shiny smooth ice, while other spots were already bare, bare stone, grey and flat and clear. It had been lying there beneath the snow all winter, and it had lasted so long, the winter, everything had lasted so long. I hadn't thought about it, but now I suddenly felt how long it had lasted.

I spotted a small wisp of yellow grass at the edge of the stone slabs, I wanted to pick it. I walked over and crouched down and grabbed it to pull it up. It was stuck fast in the frozen ground still. I managed to loosen a few straws.

I stood up holding the straws. The time, Liv, you forget the time, the church coffee, hello. I hurried over to the steps, down towards the road. The snow was wet, I was wearing my green rubber boots, I waded. The snow stayed on the green boot-tip, I stamped it off, kept walking. I had dropped in to the sacristy and taken my cassock and my shoes off, pulled on the thick brown woollen jumper with turtleneck. The trousers were still hanging over the edge of the boots, I bent down and stuffed them in, securely.

Week 43

(Uke 43)

First published: 2003, 229 pp

Foreign rights sold: Danish (Athene), Swedish (Alfabet)

Solveig, 33, has recently been engaged to teach literary history at a regional college. In the days spanned by the novel, various elements of her past life re-emerge and intermingle: her unresolved relationship with her mother, her friendship with an older colleague, Hilde, basic views on literature, and relations with her students. Exposed - and problematised - as the story unfolds are Solveig's longing to find a meaning in life, a thread, and a feeling of solidarity with those about her.

Week 43 is both a controversial mélange of ideas and a delicately shaded character study. Through her intense, precise mode of writing and taut construction the author opens up existential space, and by casting a searching spotlight on Solveig's daily round reveals how ethical dimensions are ever present.



“This is a complex, brilliantly crafted novel that reveals new twists and turns with every reading, a book concerned with truly important issues.”

MORGENBLADET

“Ørstavik now occupies a central position in Norwegian literature.”

MORGENBLADET

the calling - the novel

(kallet - romanen)

First published: 2006, 190 pp

Foreign rights sold: Danish (Athene), Swedish (Kabusa)



the calling - the novel is about a writer who has recently left her husband and moved with her daughter to a small flat. She wants to write a novel about her grandmother who left for China as a missionary in the 1920s, but the story won't come to her.

the calling – the novel explores what a novel is, what it means to write, what it means to wake up and face a new day. It asks what it is to want something, in your own life and in relationships to others. Who and what decides?

the calling - the novel is about art, life and cognition. It explores possibilities of movement and change in an open manner.

A full English translation is available from Aschehoug Agency.

“Ørstavik is hammeringly, annoyingly good”

POLITIKEN, DENMARK

“If you are troubled by existence, you should trouble yourself with Hanne Ørstavik’s prose. Another well written novel from the Norwegian writer. ... [Ørstavik] stands massively there in the contemporary literary landscape, provocative and unignorable, challenging me, asking me questions that can’t be shrugged off.”

INFORMATION, DENMARK

“*the calling - the novel* is about an author who cannot write a novel. But Hanne Ørstavik can, and *the calling - the novel* is a novel which with an almost creepy intensity encircles questions about art, life and indentity ... It is fascinating how the psychological and ethical crises are woven together in this intense portrait of an artist.”

NRK, KULTURNYTT

Cut

(Hakk)

First published: 1994, 95 pp

Cut is a novel made up of prose images from a summer in the life of a woman. She lives alone far north where a river runs into the ocean. A man moves into the apartment above her, and the relationship that develops between them, make memories from her childhood coming back to her. Present images are juxtaposed with old ones, making new patterns and connections appear.



Entropy

(Entropi)

First published: 1995, 117 pp

Entropy is a portrait of a woman who works as an assistant nurse at a nursing home. One morning she finds herself unable to leave home for work, and remains standing by her window looking out. From below her seemingly calm surface, a suppressed and ever more intense energy starts appearing in the woman. A naked man is lying asleep in her bed. Will she do something to him? What is "real" and what is "only happening inside her"?

“Entropy is a strange... and fascinating book”

MORGENBLADET

“Hanne Ørstavik’s literary significance grows from novel to novel... An existential novel dealing with both the heaviness and lightness of language, written with impressive strength and courage... Rarely does one come across such a perceptive analytical mind as Hanne Ørstavik. She gives nothing away for free, there is no overdriven emotion, no sentimentality nor pandering to her public. The story’s concept overrides everything, all the layers of the onion are peeled away until we come to the heart of the question. Hanne Ørstavik never makes it easy for herself or the reader in her rigorous treatment of these existential problems. But thanks to a language rich in its precision, with no loss of simplicity, it becomes an experience to follow her to her conclusion. One knows that one has read something substantial which one would not wish to be without”

DAGBLADET

“Ørstavik has an almost unnerving ability to reproduce the tone of the inner dialogues people have with themselves, she is unsurpassed in her description of the way wordless thoughts slip and slide from one theme to the next ...The author also has a extraordinary eye for detail...one of the country’s most interesting authors”

ADRESSEAVISEN

“Hanne Ørstavik is one of the Nordic countries’ most important contemporary writers. ”

MORGENBLADET

For foreign rights, please contact

FRØYDIS JØRVE

Rights manager

froydis.jorve@aschehougagency.no

Tel: + 47 40 24 49 69

www.aschehougagency.no

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