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De aanslag by Harry Mulisch

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calm turn into fear of seduction and exploitation. The expectant poet, desiring the vitality of communality, which provides rest and renewal for life, realizes that one must portray life realistically, must believe in, and act upon, "something" in order to avoid a Ragnarok. Art, like the ego—or a foreshadowing pause in life's flow—is, however, only a little everyday reflection of the cosmic, typified by conception, death, and rebirth.

Rifbjerg (see *BA* 49:1, pp. 25–29), who never ceases to be amazed at the mystery of sex and conception, envisions life as a cyclic repetition of pain and fertility. Since nature's purpose means mankind's eventual destruction, life itself becomes a nirvanic illusion. Rifbjerg's poetry varies from romantic narrative to the very personal symbolism of modernism. His "Song of the Fish," possibly describing the sperm's journey, seems the sexual equivalent of Ole Wivel's Christian symbol in "The Fish" (1948) and exemplifies the prolific Rifbjerg's richly textured poems.

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Michael Strunge. *Væbnet med vinger*. Copenhagen. Borgen. 1984. 142 pages, ill. 144 kr.

Self-destruction and death were the final possibilities of *Ud af natten* (1982) by the young poet Michael Strunge (b. 1958). In one of the last poems, "Suicide (Attempt)," he wrote, "I regret nothing / even if I came home from there / on my way up was Hell"; and when writing "December," he explained in a postscript that he was "maniacally concerned" about Ole Sarvig, the Danish poet who died in December 1981 (see *WLT* 53:4, pp. 606–609). The prose poems of *Væbnet med vinger* (Armed with Wings) should be read in this context. The headings of the five parts mark the course of Strunge's life after his visit to the land of the dead: "I have returned—to Hell—to myself, my sisters, the Heaven—down on the Earth—to the world." His environment is the city, with neon glare, TV addiction, pollution. The restless ego feels like an "unbidden guest of the world" who cannot find his center amid the chaos. Strunge paints a picture of a civilization heading for disaster, in some ways related to the universe of Ole Sarvig. His mood swings from deep depression and aggression toward the "system" ("all you parents, nurses, employers") to a manic sensation of flying as an angel in contact with God—on a poetic mission.

In actual fact the book is about the painful process of poetic creation. At night in the city, the lonely poet is sitting in his room, in front of his droning electric typewriter with all the lights turned on. The border between dream and reality has been suspended: "Language is all!" The air is vibrating with "ultrapoetry." In an absurd, narcissistic gesture he tries to phone himself, for "Everything has to be changed. By these eyes, by writing, and by the phone." A female figure enters his room, probably his muse or anima; then he turns godlike and creates new poems. Next morning, with monumental arrogance while beholding the city, he thinks, "We are the ones turning the globe / when we care to."

Strunge belongs to the youngest generation of poets, those inspired by the youth revolt and beat music of the sixties (Doors, Rolling Stones) and by the punk movement of the seventies (Sex Pistols, Bowie); but to an astonishingly high degree they also draw on such different classics as Rimbaud, B. S. Ingemann, and Ole Sarvig. Their poetry has rightly been called "the New Sensitivity," but it must be seen within

the scope of hot-tempered punk music and a desperate nihilism. The main work of the generation is *Requiem & Messe* (1981) by Bo Green Jensen (see *WLT* 56:3, p. 530).

In the last (and poetically weakest) part of *Væbnet med vinger* the poet's anima is replaced by a real girl, Cecilie. Their "hearts" are described as "two birds": "They reach far in seconds— / spread out their wings and cover the city"; under a universal perspective of eternity "only you and I" exist. The entire book is consequently illustrated by the graffiti of Michael and Cecilie. In an added note Strunge states that this book is his last. Everything indicates that the twenty-six-year-old poet has been scared by the creative passion he experienced (and described) in his "ivory tower" and that he no longer wishes to pay the price of loneliness and privation for poetry that breaks new ground.

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Dutch

Harry Mulisch. *De aanslag*. Amsterdam. De Bezige Bij. 1984. 255 pages. 24.50 fl.

Mulisch's seventh novel, *De aanslag* (The Assault), skillfully traces coincidence in several major episodes in the life of Anton Steenwijk. The events follow the 1945 killing of a Haarlem police inspector during the German Occupation.

In part 1, at the age of twelve, Anton is at home with his parents and his older brother Peter. Suddenly six shots ring out, and the family discovers that Fake Ploeg, a hated collaborator, has just been assassinated in front of a neighbor's residence. Moments later, two of the neighbors, Karin Korteweg and her father, place the corpse in front of the Steenwijk home. When Peter goes out to move the corpse back, he is shot at by a German police patrol and forced to flee. Shortly thereafter the Occupation forces kill Anton's parents and set fire to their home. Anton is taken to Amsterdam to be raised by relatives.

At the age of nineteen, Anton makes his first return to Haarlem. The Kortewegs have long since moved away, and the remaining neighbors can only commiserate with him as the sole family member to survive. Several years later, he encounters Ploeg's son, also named Fake, a childhood classmate. After an uncertain initial discussion of their common loss, Fake leaves in a rage when Anton seeks to blame the elder Ploeg for the killing of Anton's family. In part 4, at the age of thirty-three, Anton accidentally meets Cor Takes (the man who killed Ploeg) at the funeral of a former member of the Dutch underground. Their encounter is almost as hostile as the meeting Anton had with Ploeg's son. Again Anton's loss of his family and the issue of blame dominate the conversation. Cor's contention that blame has no part in the conversation and that victims cannot be avoided receives further support in the final episode, where Anton meets Karin Korteweg. Now forty-nine years old, Anton is still attempting to understand why the Steenwijks were victimized. Karin's explanation that for two years the other neighbors had secretly been hiding a Jewish family helps Anton see that victims do not choose their role and that chance and timing are often the sole arbiters of one's destiny.

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