

JAN BRODAL

Floral Motifs in Garšin and Dagny Juel: A Literary Parallel

After having held literature under its sway during the 1870s and 1880s, realism gradually loses its dominance as the 1890s draw closer.

This is the period which was dubbed “la belle époque” or, more neutrally “fin de siècle”. The former name, with its affectionate ring, points to the relative stability of the period; it was a time of peace, progress and comparative affluence. Just as a beloved child often has many names, the art and literature of the time has many names: Modernism, neo-romanticism, secession, art nouveau, dekadentizm, dekadentstvo, symbolism, impressionism. Should the quality of this art be measured by the number of names it bears, it was indeed a very rich time.¹ The writers, having rid themselves of the strict, rational dogmas of realism, which was understood by many as the ultimate, scientifically approved artistic interpretation of reality, now start to indulge in fantasies – sometimes more or less bizarre – and give free vent to the hidden impulses of the mind.

Precisely these qualities are easily detected in that poetic manifesto of Norwegian neo-romanticism, Vilhelm Krag’s “Fandango”, as well as in the novels of Knut Hamsun, to mention only two of the representatives of this trend on Norwegian soil.

The Russian writer most widely read in Norway during the 1890s was – without doubt – neither Fedor Dostoevskij nor Lev Tolstoj, but Vsevolod Garšin. In the course of a comparatively short time practically all of his works were published in a succession of editions, translated by the well-known Norwegian translator K. Fosse.² Since these editions

¹ A more systematic discussion of these terms can be found in Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska, *Literatura Młodej Polski*, Warszawa 2001, pp. 5-18.

² Jan Brodal, “The Reception of V. M. Garšin in Norway”. In *The Slavic World and Scandinavia: Cultural Relations*, Århus 1988, pp. 53-63.

were consecutive, we may conclude that the enterprise was not unprofitable for the publisher. Garšin also attracted the favourable attention of such well-known critics of the time in Norway, as Nils Kjær and Carl Nærup.

Looking back, one cannot but admit that Garšin was a true innovator, a writer “ahead of his time”. We find in him many features typical of modernism that are not discernible in any of his Russian contemporaries, but are already prominent outside Russia. (As we know, Charles Baudelaire published *Les Fleurs du Mal* in 1857).

Among Scandinavian scholars of the Slavonic literatures, Ad. Stender Petersen has pointed to Garšin’s role as an anticipator of symbolism. Commenting on Garšin’s famous short story “Krasnyj cvetok” (The Red Flower, 1888), he states that “i denne mærkelige novelle nåede Garšin så tæt ind til en symbolistisk motivbehandling, at kun et skridt syntes at skille ham fra den litteratur som faktisk slog igennem i det næste århundrede” [“in this strange short story, Garšin came so close to a symbolistic treatment of his motif that he seems to be just one step away from the literature that would actually achieve a breakthrough in the new century”].³

That Garšin also may have influenced Scandinavian writers from the period after the breakthrough of symbolism or neo-romanticism is indicated by the writings of Dagny Juel Przybyszewska (1866-1901).

Dagny Juel Przybyszewska is one of those characters of whom it is proverbially said that they never become prophets in their own home country. Although her plays were staged in several places in Poland and Bohemia during the first decade of the 20th century, they have never been produced on stage in her home country. Although interest in her seems to be on the increase, she still seems to be better known as the wife of the turbulent Polish writer Stanislaw Przybyszewski and an inspiration for a long series of literary and artistic lovers (including August Strindberg and Edvard Munch), than as a literary artist in her own right. Nevertheless, she wrote a series of short plays and poems in prose, as well as some poems, and in addition she translated the first two volumes of her

³ Ad. Stender-Petersen, *Den russiske literaturs historie*, København 1952, Vol. 3, p. 200.

husband's novel trilogy *Homo Sapiens* from German into Dano-Norwegian (Stanisław Przybyszewski until 1892 used German almost exclusively as his literary tool).

Dagny's writings are in several ways quite typical of the literary style and thematics that was dominant around the *fin de siècle*, a literature that expressed what Knut Hamsun in his unique way formulated as "de hemmelige bevægelser, som bedrives upåaktet på de avsides steder i sjælen, den fornærmelsesnes uberegnelige uorden, det delikate følelsesliv holdt under lupen, disse tankens og følelsens vandringer i det blå, skridtløse, sporløse reiser med hjernen og hjertet, selsomme hjernevirksomheder, blodets hvisken, benpibernes bøn, hele det ubevidste sjæleliv".⁴ Still there is something more to be traced in Dagny Juel Przybyszewska, a personal, feminine accent, an unexpected twist to the accepted standards of *fin de siècle* "bohemian literature", which gives her dramatic, flowery texts – sometimes exalted in the extreme – a certain feminine strangeness which makes the reader interested, or even slightly provoked.

Undoubtedly the frequent occurrences of floral motives in the works of the *moderna* is highly significant of its time, the end of the 19th century. So is the concept of creating a synthetic style, embracing and uniting all forms of art. Thus floral motives are to be found not only in the literature of the time, but also — and even more so — in the pictorial arts. As perhaps never before or after, there existed at this time certain bonds that expressed themselves in common motives and methods, uniting art in its most different forms.

A Polish historian of art expresses this aptly:

"Nigdy przedtem nie rozwinęła się jednocześnie, w sposób równoległy literatura, muzyka, sztuki piękne. Nastąpiła integracja sztuk, swoista symbioza jej poszczególnych rodzajów i gatunków. Wyrazna stała się dążność do wzajemnego łączenia się i wzajemnego przenika-

⁴ "(...) the secret movements which go on unnoticed in the faraway recesses of the soul, this unpredictable disorder of the perceptions, the delicate life of the imagination put under the magnifying glass. The peregrinations of the mind and the emotions of the blue, journeys in the heart and brain, without tracks and traces, the whispering of the blood, the prayers of the blood cavities, the subconscious life of the soul in all its richness". Originally published in the journal *Samtiden*, 1900.

nia. Malarstwo stało się poetyckie, literatura wzorowała się na muzyce, poezja upodobniła się do prozy, proza zaś do poezji. Krytyka literacka i krytyka malarska ztosowały zbieżny język (...)”.⁵

Therefore, one of the most characteristic representatives of the *moderna* is the Pole Stanisław Wyspiański, who in his person united the fiction writer and pictorial artist. Wyspiański wrote poems and plays, he painted and designed furniture, posters, and books. He left posterity many exact and beautiful drawings of plants and flowers (motives later utilized by the Polish Post Office as motifs for postage stamps).

And Dagny Juel Przybyszewska not only had ambitions as a writer, but also as a pianist, besides translating her husband’s novels from German into Dano-Norwegian.

The floral motifs, then, express the vitalism inherent in the art of the secession period, which also makes itself felt in one of the names applied to this current: *Jugend*, which means *youth*. Its never-ending floral ornaments signify the provocative potency of an artistic movement which was sure that the future was on their side. At the same time its exponents express an extremely keen awareness of death. In Dagny Juel Przybyszewska, for instance, Love always appears in conjunction with Death. Thus the floral imagery, the floral ornaments, which never appear in isolation, which always link on to something, is also an expression of the eternal recurrence of things, a notion that attracted great interest at the turn of the 19th century. These images of flowering and ever recurring Life never fail to tell us that the individual lives of plants and flowers nevertheless manage to assure us that, although the individual has to die, Youth everlasting will be victorious in the great Chain of Being.

But let us return to Garšin. In him floral imagery is most prominently employed in fables (or fairy tales as Ad. Stender Petersen prefers to call them), such as “Attalea Princeps” and “Skazka o žabe i roze” (The Tale of the Toad and the Rose), as well as in the famous “Krasnyj cvetok”.

⁵ Stefania Krzysztofowicz-Kozakowska: “Ruch Artystyczny końca wieku. Od narodowego romantyzmu do Młodej Polski”. In *Młoda Polska 1890-1920*. Kraków-Brussels 1997, p. 31.

In all these places the floral motif is used for purposes of allegory. In the lesser of the three, “Skazka o žabe i roze”, it is employed to juxtapose beauty and ugliness, good and evil, in a moral as well as an aesthetic way.

The forces of evil, embodied in the shape of an ugly and repulsive toad, are repelled by the forces of good in the shape of the rose and a brother and a sister. The girl thwarts the toad’s attempt to gobble up the rose, kisses it and presents it to her brother, “which was the best thing that had ever happened to the rose in all her life.”⁶

“Attalea Princeps” tells the story of a giant palm by that name. The palm, like the other plants appearing in the fairytale, is slightly anthropomorphized to serve the artistic purposes of the author. Attalea grows in a greenhouse “in a certain big city” which may easily be identified as “gorod na Neve”. The plants are protected by the glass roof from the severe Northern climate, but nevertheless they are suffering from their lack of freedom, they are “imprisoned plants”:

“Vast though the greenhouse was, they were cramped in it. The tangled roots fought one another for moisture and nutrition. The branches of the trees were entwined with the huge leaves of the palms, which they bent and broke, themselves pressing up against the iron frames and bending and breaking in turn. The gardeners were constantly lopping the branches and tying the leaves up with wire to curb their wild growth, but it did not help much. What the plants needed was the wide free spaces of their native habitats. They were natives of hot climes, luxurious creations, who remembered their native countries, and yearned for them. However transparent the glass roof might be, it was not the bright sky.”

Attalea tries to unite the other plants to make a break for freedom, but does not get much help from what we today might be prone to call “the silent majority”. In the end, she succeeds in defecting to freedom, only to discover that freedom is not what she expected it to be:

⁶ All quotations from the works of V. M. Garšin are from the edition V. Garšin, *Stories*, translated by Bernard Isaacs, Moscow, 1982.

“Is this all?” she thought. “Is this all I languished and suffered for so much? And to attain this had been my fondest dream?”

In the end *Attalea* is cut down by the authorities of the botanic garden. Freedom brings her not Fulfilment, but Death.

Another work by Garšin where floral imagery is prominent, is “*Krasnyj cvetok*”. In it “Garshin’s morbid, highly-strung moral sensitivity reaches its highest pitch”, reflects Dmitrij Mirskij.⁷

In this story the final message may seem somewhat more optimistic than in “*Attalea Princeps*”, but the contents is even more sombre. The protagonist is an inmate of a psychiatric hospital. Gradually he arrives at the conclusion that a sumptuous scarlet flower growing in the hospital garden is the incarnation of all that is evil in the world, and that he himself has been chosen to uproot this flower, thus ridding the world of the evil besetting it. His act assumes the character of an act of self-sacrifice and religious heroism (*podvig*), which makes it part of an age-old Russian social and literary tradition. The story’s hero is aware that this act will involve his death, but this does not in any way intimidate him:

“The last!” whispered the patient. “The last. Today victory or death. But that does not matter any more. Wait”, he said, looking up at the sky, “I shall be with you soon.”

In Dagny Juel Przybyszewska’s works, floral imagery predominates in her prose poems, although it can occasionally be found in her plays as well. Her work stems from a tradition different from that of Garšin, and thematically they differ considerably from them as well. A central position in them is occupied by the man-woman relationship, especially as manifested in its erotic aspects. Emotional antagonisms, often originating from feelings of jealousy, abound. In her texts, she stresses the elemental forces of existence, life and death, love and jealousy. These forces are given preeminence above the principles of morality and religion.

⁷ Cf. D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature from its Beginnings to 1900*, ed. Francis J. Whitfield, New York, 1958, p. 350.

Dagny Juel Przybyszewska's prose poems are often provided with epigraphs designed to put the reader in an appropriate mood. As a rule they are written in another language than her mother tongue: "Sing mir das Lied vom Leben und vom Tode", "Et la tristesse de tout cela, oh mon âme...", "I Tasmørket", "In questa tomba oscura..."

The floral motifs of Dagny Juel Przybyszewska function on several planes and are of a very protean character, even as the authorial focus is shifts and the motif appears in a changed form.

In Dagny Juel Przybyszewska, as elsewhere in the literature of the end of the 19th century, the flower often appears as a symbol of life. The flower is introduced as such in "Sing mir das Lied vom Leben und vom Tode". A woman sits by the bier of her dead husband, who is initially described in very positive turns of phrase:

Hans øines lysende straalere havde spundet et diadem om hendes pande, stoltere end nogen kongelig herskerinde havde baaret det. Hun havde været dronning i kærlighedens rige, thi aldrig havde nogen mand elsket en kvinde høiere end han hende. Og nu var han død.⁸

[The bright beams of his eyes had spun a diadem about her forehead, prouder than any royal ruler had ever worn. She had been queen of the realm of love, for never had any man loved a woman more than he loved her. And now he was dead.]

While the husband is described in extremely positive terms, the woman is correspondingly described in negative terms:

Hun tænkte paa alt, han havde givet hende – og hvor lidet hun havde givet ham igjen.

[She thought of all he had given her – and how little she had given him in return.]

⁸ All citations from the works of Dagny Juel Przybyszewska are taken from the edition Dagny Juel, *Samlede skrifter*, Elverum, 1996.

Dagny Juel depicts Death metaphorically by likening it to the withering of flowers and trees, just as, e.g. Vilhelm Krag does in his famous poem “Fandango”:

Aldri mer skulde hun læse i hans øine, at hun var solen, hvorum jorden dreied sig. Aldri mer skulde hun føle duften af de blomster hans kjærlighed avlede frem omkring hende. Blomsterne var nu visnede, og dronningkronen havde dødens knokkelhaand revet af hendes hoved.

[Never more would she read in his eyes that she was the Sun around which the Earth turned. Never more would she smell the scent of the flowers that his love propagated around her. The flowers were now withered, and the queen’s crown had been torn from her head by the bony hand of death.]

Thus her status as woman, beloved and beautiful, somehow appears to be conditioned by the existence of a male partner, in this case her husband; as soon as he is gone, her “queen’s tiara” is gone as well.

Continuing with the text, we soon notice that this praise is not at all without reservations. The protagonist submits to the death of her husband without particular grief:

Hun følte sig rolig, lettet, nesten glad. Hun strakte armene ud og åndede dybt, som befriet fra en pinlig tanke.

[She felt calm, relieved, almost happy. She stretched out her arm and took a deep breath, which released her from a painful thought.]

What she has experienced in their conjugal life, then, may rather be described as somewhat of a burden:

Ah, blomsterne i hans kjærligheds have havde vokset for yppigt omkring hende, duften havde betaget hende aandedrættet, blomsterranerne havde slynget sig om hendes liv, til hun havde følt sig bunden på hænder og fødder.

[Ah, the flowers in the garden of his love had grown too abundantly about her, the scent had stolen her breath away, their stalks had

wound themselves about her body until she had felt she was bound hand and foot.]

One may risk the contention that the flowers in Dagny Juel Przybyszewska's poem have changed from being a symbol of freedom into being a symbol of bondage.

On this point, one might as well presume an analogy with Garšin's "Attalea Princeps". In this short story the protagonist at a certain point ceases to be a symbol of free will, liberty and life, and turns into a symbol of death.

At this point in the description we take leave of the floral motif, until the poetess finally reintroduces it, in a rather odd twist which might even be characterized as mediumistic:

Og hun gik dage og nætter og grubled over denne gaade, over disse øine, der fyldte hende med gru, men tillige med en syg længsel, hun aldri før havde kjendt.

Og med et vidste hun det...Det var hans øine! Hans! Den døde! Det var den mands øine, der havde elsket hende saa høit, at hans kjærligheds vingeslag selv efter døden fulgte hendes liv.

Kom han for at spørge, om hun virkelig havde ladet ham falde som et vissent blad, om hun havde begravet erindringen om ham og hans elskov med hans stivnede legeme?

Nei, hun vilde ikke se disse fordrende øine, hun vilde ikke mindes om sin gjæld. Og hun undveg alle blikke for kun ikke at møde dette ene med dets flammespørgsmål, hun ikke vilde søge svar paa.

[And she spent days and nights worrying about this enigma, about these eyes that filled her with awe, but also with a sick longing she had never felt before.

And all at once she knew... They were his eyes! His! The dead man's eyes! They were the eyes of the man who had loved her so much that the wingbeats of his love, even after death, followed her life.

Did he come to ask if she had really dropped him like a withered leaf, if she had buried her memory of him and his love with his stiff body?

No, she did not want to see these challenging eyes, she did not want to be reminded of her debt. And she avoided all gazes just so she would not meet this one gaze with the burning question that she did not want to seek an answer to.]

“In questa tomba obscura” reminds the reader of the horror visions of Edgar Allan Poe. Again withering flowers and trees symbolize death, and as in “Sing mir das Lied vom Leben und vom Tode”, there appears a lover who wants to return to life in order to keep the object of his love under surveillance. And this time the consequences of this intervention may be interpreted as fatal:

Og da hun nu sprang op og vendte sig om, stod han foran hende, han som laa paa baaren, han som eied svaret. Og han saa paa hende med store, levende, glødende øine. Og hun hvisked skjælvende, aandeløs: Svaret, svaret, giv meg nu svaret!

Da følte hun paa ny hans hænder blive kolde, hans ansigt stivne i dødens bleghed, og hans øine lukked sig tungt under hendes fortvivlede blik.

Kun hans hænder pressed hendes fast og ubønhørrigt, og hun visned under deres greb, under hans døde blik, hvordan hun visned som et træ om høsten, medens atter stormen sang sin vilde dødspsalme omkring hende og nattens sorte hylled hende ind for evigt.

[And when she now leapt up and turned around, he was standing before her, he who was lying on the bier, he who possessed the answer. And he looked at her with big, living, glowing eyes. And she whispered, trembling, breathless: The answer, the answer, just give me the answer!

Then once more she felt his hands go cold, his face stiffen in the pallor of death, and his eyes closed heavily under her desperate gaze.

Only his hands pressed hers firmly and mercilessly, and she withered in their grip, under his dead gaze, how she withered like a tree in autumn, while once more the storm sang its wild hymn of death around her and the black of night wrapped itself about her for ever.]

On this note, on those repeated floral metaphors, end Dagny Juel Przybyszewska's prose poems. They were published in the journal *Samtiden* in 1900, that is on the very same note which introduces them, in "Sing mir das Lied vom Leben und vom Tode".

Still, the central poem as regards the question of a possible literary influence by Garšin on Dagny Juel Przybyszewska is the one called "I tusmørket" ("In the Dusk"). Here the floral imagery constitutes the sustaining structure of the whole poem, just as in Garšin's "Attalea Princeps" and "Krasnyj cvetok".

The way the poetess treats her floral images is characteristic: The flower in "I tusmørket" is a real flower with stem and leaves, but it is still not naturalistically or even realistically described. This impression is not least caused by its protean, ever-changing nature: At one point we are told that it is a cornflower, but in the next moment the poetess supplies information which makes this highly improbable.

In the beginning, it is just one flower:

Denne blomst, denne underlige blomst... Hun satte sig hen til den og lod dens fine, lange stængel kjærtegne sit knæ.
[This flower, this strange flower... She sat down beside it and let its long, thin stalk caress her knee.]

Then, suddenly, it multiplies into all the flowers of her youth:

Hvor ung hun den gang var, og hvor fjern fra livet! Saa fjern, at selv hendes længsel neppe naed det. Hun saa sig selv med favnen fuld af blomster, kornblomster, blaa som hendes eget sind, blaa som hendes tankelætte foraarssjæl. Og hun kastet og strøed blomsterne omkring sig, strøet og samled... gule i haaret, røde om armene, blaa, hvide... tulipaner, fioler, syringer (sic!)... Og duften fyldte hendes sind, men sjælen sov.

Saa kom rosernes dage. Bare roser, fulde, tunge, flammende roser...

[How young she was then, and how far removed from life! So distant that even her desire barely reached it. She saw herself with her arms filled with flowers, cornflowers, blue as her own mind, blue as

her cheery spring soul. And she threw the flowers and strewed them around her, strewed and gathered... flaxen hair, red arms, blue, white... tulips, violets, lilacs... And the scent filled her mind, but her soul slept.

Then came the days of roses. Just roses, full, heavy, flaming roses...]

But before this, we have already been introduced to the flower as a personification of the female protagonist, as her alter ego, so to speak:

Dens øine fyldte hende med en hemmelig lykke. Hun læste sin egen længsel i blomstens store, bløde øine. Hun havde fundet noget igjen i den, noget hun havde mistet, en klang, en tone i sin sjæl. Den sang en hymne hun havde glemt. Oh, det smerted som en krænkelse, naar en (sic!) af de store, hvide øine visned bort og faldt.

Og hun tænkte paa alle sit livs brogede, duftende blomster. Hun følte dem flagre omkring sig lig tusindvingede, tusindfarvede fugle. Alle melodier havde de sunget, alle farver havde de spundet over hendes nat og dag.

[Its (i.e. the flower's) eyes filled her with a secret happiness. She read her own desire in the flower's big, soft eyes. She had found something in it, something she had lost, a tone, a note in her soul. It sang a hymn she had forgotten. Oh, it stung like an insult whenever one of the big white eyes withered away and fell.

And she thought of all the gaudy, sweet-smelling flowers in her life. She felt them flapping about her like many-winged, many-coloured birds. They had sung all melodies, they had spun all colours about her night and day.]

This partial identification is not sustained however, in accordance with the ever-changing authorial focus. The flowers again and again appear as independent, although closely related, beings.

What can be considered a fact at least, is that the flower(s) can be considered the central phenomenon and ultimate symbol of the female protagonist's life, and this symbol changes from good to bad.

At a certain point the narrative makes a sudden turn, not unlike what happens in “Sing mir das Lied vom Leben und vom Tode”. It is worth while citing the poetess at some length on this point:

Men da roserne visned, glæded hun sig. Hun nød at se bladene gulne i randen. Hun tog bægge hender fuld (sic!) og lod dem falde, et for et. Hun rysted hækken, saa et regn af matte, blege blade risted over hendes hoved. Og hun saa at roserne var sorte med forkullede blade.

Da gik hun langsomt langs bække og myrer, og hun samlede myrens blege voksblomster med dunede stængler, hun samlede bækkens hvide kalablomster med de gyldne munde, hun samlede søens matlysende stjerner og roser med de kolde, vaade arme, og snigende voksede de ind i hendes hjerte og suget sig fast derinde.

Men hun frøs, og en morgen følte hun sit hjerte som en hvid og kold krystal. Glansen skar hende i øinene, og hun længtes efter hemmelige blomster, som ingen sol havde skindet paa, farlige blomster, som bar gift i sine aarer, bedøvende og uforstaaelige.

Og en nat fandt hun dybt inde i skoven, inde i skyggen, hvor ingen solstraale kunde naa frem, en mørk og skjæbnesvanger plante med laadne blade og tungsindige klokker av farve hentet fra himmelen og fra jorden. Hun læste graadig i dens slørede øine, hun pressede den til sit hjerte, og hun følte, at hun elskede dens giftige aande.

Stille tog hun den med til sit hjem, triumferende satte hun den i høialteret og ofrede til den. Og en gysende glæde fyldte hende ved at se giften dryppe ned, draabe for draabe dryppe over sit allerhelligste...

Men ogsaa hendes stolte giftblomst visned, og da den træt foldede sine blade sammen, rev hun den rasende ned fra sin helligdom og kastede den ud på gaden.

[But then, when the roses withered, she was happy. She loved to see the leaves yellow at the edges. She filled both hands and let them fall, one by one. She shook the bush, so a shower of dull, pale leaves rustled above her head. And she saw that the roses were black with charred leaves.

Then she strolled slowly along streams and moors, and she picked the pale waxflowers of the moors with their downy stalks, she picked the white calla of the stream with their golden mouths, she picked the

dimly glowing stars and roses of the lake with their cold, wet arms, and they wiled their way into her heart and clung on to it tightly.

But she was cold, and one morning she felt her heart as a cold, white crystal. Its shine blinded her, and she longed for secret flowers no sun had ever shone upon, dangerous flowers that carried poison in their veins, sleep-inducing and ungraspable.

And one night she found, deep in the forest, in the shade where no ray of the sun could penetrate, a dark, fateful plant with hirsute leaves and heavy-hearted bells of a colour taken from the sky and the earth. Avidly she read its veiled eyes, she pressed it to her heart, and she felt she loved its poisonous breath.

Quietly she took it back to her home, triumphantly she placed it on the high altar and made a sacrifice to it. And a terrible happiness filled her on seeing the poison drip down, dripping drop by drop over her most sacred place...

But even her proud poison flower withered, and when it was tired and folded its leaves, in a rage she tore it down from her altar and cast it out into the street.]

Dagny Juel Przybyszewska thus eventually enters the metaphysical sphere. The flower which has already been anthropomorphized is now elevated to the status of an evil deity, at the same time as the protagonist's dwelling is being transformed to a place of adoration, a veritable shrine. This calls to mind one of Dagny's husband's most famous titles: "The Synagogue of Satan".

But here, as we see, the literary creator is superior to the newly created evil deity; it does not possess eternal life, and is therefore dropped on the garbage heap by its disappointed worshipper. In her literary universe, the literary creator has power to overthrow gods and the fundamental forces of life.

Here is a parallel with Garšin in "Krasnyj cvetok". The only difference is that Garšin describes this state of affairs as a result of folly, whereas, in Dagny Juel Przybyszewska's universe, it is part of an inherent order.

Identical in both works is the interpretation of the flower as the agent of the evil power of Ahriman; in Garšin it may even be interpreted as

Ahriman himself: When the madman uproots and kills the scarlet flower he definitely liquidates all that is evil on earth. He takes it away from the place where it is growing, as the protagonist of “I tasmørket” takes her evil flower away from the sacred place where she has put it. In the latter case, the flower is transformed from a symbol of love into a symbol of evil – this transformation is not to be found in Garšin, although the scarlet flower, besides being a symbol of evil, is also to a certain extent a symbol of beauty. The same goes for the symbolic function as an embodiment of “The God that failed”; it is prominent in Dagny Juel Przybyszewska, but is not to be found in Garšin.

In “Krasnyj cvetok”, we are witnessing a struggle involving Life and Death. In Dagny Juel Przybyszewska, the dramatic introduction peters out in something which is rather a dream, or can even be interpreted as a funny play, as becomes evident at the end, where part of the imagery employed in the introduction is repeated:

Nu vilde hun ingen blomster mer... Men de kom, de voksede op allevegne, de myldred omkring hende, flagred omkring i hendes stue som tusindvingede, tusindfarvede fugle. Skinnende liljer slikked efter hende med glødende mennesketunger, orchideer, chrysantemer, kaktus, orleander (sic!)... brune, gule, underlig røde, blaa som eventyrets lysende grotte. Duften fortumled hende... hun hørte deres hvisken... nu saa hun hele blomsterskaren skride imod sig... de trykked hende, pressed hende, de pusted sin skrækkelige aande ind i ansigtet... hun kvaltes... hun kvaltes... oh!

Hun var jo alene og kun en blomst, hendes sjæls blomst stod ved hendes side. Den kjærtegned hende med sin lange, fine stængel og saa paa hende med de store, hvide stjerneøine.

Da følte hun sit hjerte banke af en ny lykke, hun følte dets strenge klinge under blomstens blik: min stjerne, stjernen over min sjæl!

Og sangen steg og fyldte rommet, og hun vidste at hendes lykke boed i den: min stjerne, stjernen over min sjæl.

[Now she wanted no more flowers... But they came, they grew everywhere, they milled around her, flapping about her lounge like many-winged, many-coloured birds. Shining lilies licking at her with red-hot human tongues, orchids, chrysanthemums, cacti, oleander...

brown, yellow, strange hues of red, blue as a shiny fairytale grotto. The scent confused her... she heard their whispers... now she saw the whole host of flowers march towards her... they pressed her, squeezed her, they blew their terrible breath into her face... she was choking... she was choking... oh!

But she was all alone and just one flower, the flower of her soul, stood by her side. It caressed her with its long, thin stalk and gazed at her with its big, white starry eyes.

Then she felt her heart beat with new happiness, she felt its string sing out under the flower's gaze: my star, the star above my soul!

And the song rose and filled the room, and she knew her happiness dwelt there: my star, the star above my soul.]

Thus, the flower in Dagny Juel Przybyszewska's prose poem in the end emerges as a positive symbol, contrary to what is the case in "Krasnyj cvetok".

The question remains whether it is possible to postulate a literary influence from Garšin on Dagny Juel Przybyszewska, on the background of the parallels indicated above. Some facts that contradict this conclusion are the following: From what we know today, it is not possible to establish with certainty that Dagny Juel Przybyszewska knew V. M. Garšin, let alone read his works. Generally speaking, not many of Dagny's letters and personal notes have survived. Her marriage to Stanisław Przybyszewski was gradually considered more and more of a mismatch by her relatives, who took care to destroy anything which might shed light on the relationship. On the other hand, Przybyszewski's second wife Jadwiga embraced Dagny with morbid jealousy, and burned all the letters remaining in the possession of her husband.

Still Garšin's great popularity in Russia and beyond in the 1890s, and his reputation as a fashionable writer, makes it unlikely that Dagny, with her affinities to the Slavonic world, should not know him and his writings. It seems likely that she must have read his works in the translations of Karl Olav Fosse or in German translation.

Thematically as well as formally, we have been able to point to obvious parallels and similarities. Their attraction to symbolic representation, their propensity for pessimism and their predilection for extremes

rather than *le juste milieu*, are factors that contribute to the possibility of literary influence. How important one would consider these common qualities within the present interpretation is naturally, a matter for anyone who might take upon him- or herself the task of analyzing their works. Evidently, it is possible to interpret these parallels as coincidental or expressions of a literary convention that was fashionable just then.

Again one is struck by the paradoxical fact that the method of comparative historicism in the analysis of literature often reveals its weaknesses just when it comes to the main point, i.e. its claim to be based on empirical treatment of the literary facts, because not infrequently the facts that are supposed to link the literary work with the reality of the writer are not to hand in sufficiently large numbers.

E-mail: jan.brodal@ub.uit.no