

“A Strong House We Build to Protect Us in Need...” : On Welfare Metaphors and Welfare Critique in Works by Kirsten Thorup, Vibeke Grønfeldt and Jette Drewsen

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Abstract The Danish novelists Kirsten Thorup, Jette Drewsen and Vibeke Grønfeldt had their breakthrough as storytellers in the 1970s and today they are some of the most celebrated contemporary Danish authors. The article looks more closely at how some of some of their works interact with the development of the Danish welfare state that emerges in the writers' youths. The welfare home and the welfare family are core metaphors in their narratives and thereby show how their novels interact with the political welfare rhetoric of the period.

Key words Danish literature; welfare narratives; novels on the welfare family

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For generations, Kirsten Thorup, Jette Drewsen and Vibeke Grønfeldt have been yardsticks for Danish critics, writers and readers. They had their breakthrough as storytellers in the 1970s: Jette Drewsen in 1972 with her debut book, *Hvad tænkte*

egentlig Arendse [*What was Arendse really thinking of*], which scored a bullseye in the heated sex-role discussion of the time; Kirsten Thorup in 1977 with *Lille Jonna* [*Little Jonna*], the first volume of the major series of novels about the gravitation of a young girl from country to town; and Vibeke Grønfeldt in 1978, with *Sommerens døde* [*The summer's dead*], which is a searching, psychological portrait of two young women in a rural environment that is on the decline.

The three writers have often been read separately and described on the basis of their separate contributions to the renewal of a narrative prose, as for example in the anthology *Danske digtere i det 20. århundrede* [*Danish 20th century writers*], Vol. III, 2001, in which Kirsten Thorup and Vibeke Grønfeldt are portrayed by analysis of how they have discovered new paths for prose. Here the emphasis is on their experiments with the novel form in existential narratives about changes to women's lives and the gradual extinction of the peasant culture. Monographs and PhD theses have been published as well as many university dissertations written in which the three authors feature.¹

It is typical for the various analysis to call attention to the social thematic in the works. Seen from a literary criticism point of view, we are clearly dealing with writers who in various ways make societal problems the subject of debate. But the characteristic of how this takes place is extremely generalised. Accounts often describe how the writers deal with the migration of the 1960s from country to town, the disintegration of the old village community, the emancipation of women and the psychological price paid for the liberation of the individual. But if one wishes to concretise the social thematic and make it more than just a broad context and look more closely at how some of the works interact with the development of the welfare state that emerges in the writers' youths, it can prove necessary to find a more precise approach.

In this connection, it is an advantage partly to focus on individual works, and partly to choose a system of concepts that can place the political language of the welfare state and artistic language in relation to each other.

In the following, I take a closer look at three novels: Kirsten Thorup's *Baby*, 1973 (translated into English 1979), Jette Drewsen's *Tid og sted* [*Time and Place*], 1978, and Vibeke Grønfeldt's *Det rigtige* [*The Right Thing*], 1999. These three works have been chosen because they make the home and the family core metaphors in their narratives and thereby show themselves interacting critically with the political welfare rhetoric of the period.

One gains a closer understanding of the actual welfare rhetoric by including ideas from linguistic and sociological research about 'framing' and about

the metaphors and patterns of metaphors in everyday language as well as a contemporary idea from political philosophy about politics and art as parts of a constantly on-going creation of, and struggle for, the ways in which the sensual and the sayable, words and things, are connected with each other.

The Framing of Welfare

In the establishment period of the welfare state a special welfare rhetoric emerges in one of the largest Danish political parties, the Social Democrats — a rhetoric that gradually spreads to other political parties, either as variations on the welfare metaphors or a critique of the same. The welfare rhetoric acquires its own set expressions, core metaphors and stylistic figures that one can still hear echoes of in present-day political rhetoric. Certain critics of Social Democratic welfare rhetoric actually believe that political language in Denmark is saturated with Social Democratic welfare rhetoric.²

The concept of framing has been used in sociological and linguistic research, among other things in investigations of how ideas and values crop up and are formulated in the political debate. The American sociologist John L. Campbell mentions how sociology studies the politicians' framing of their policy in order to maximise its impact. Frames function as normative and cognitive ideas and language patterns that are placed in the foreground of political debates. For example, the concept "economic globalisation" is used in the 1990s as framing for the American shift to a neoliberal economic policy.

According to the American cognitive language philosopher George Lakoff, framing is not mainly a question of politics or of creating political messages:

"Framing" is not primarily about politics or political messaging, or communication. It is far more fundamental than that: Frames are the mental structures that allow human beings to understand reality – and sometimes to create what we take to be reality. But the discovery and use of frame does have an enormous bearing on politics. Given our media-obsessed, fast-paced, talking-points political culture, it is critical that we understand the nature of framing and how it can be used. (Lakoff 25)

The idea of deep "frames" is related to Lakoff's and his partner Mark Johnson's concepts of the metaphors and conceptual patterns of everyday language, the so-called "image schemata" that enable us to comprehend the world around us. In this mode of thought, the metaphor is a basic human tool of understanding, one that is

both mentally and physically anchored. According to Lakoff, the metaphor is ‘the main mechanism through which we comprehend abstract concepts and perform abstract reasoning’ (Lakoff). When it comes to the study by cognitive semantics of particular patterns of metaphors, a spatial pattern (the fact that we understand reality via a spatial metaphoric) and a part-whole pattern can be used in the study of the deep framing of the welfare state and its objectives.

The idea of the welfare state becomes spatial and concrete when it is visualised as a home for the people and a societal family, or appears as a transferred epithet as warm, helping hands and friendly voices that speak to the citizen. It is the thesis of this article that Kirsten Thorup, Jette Drewsen and Vibeke Grønfeldt have a special outstanding account with the welfare state, since in their works and texts they react to some of the political frames and metaphorical structures and in various ways adopt a critical attitude to them via a honed linguistic awareness.

But in order to understand this exchange between literature and society it is productive to include ideas of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, who in a number of publications has dealt in depth with modern and postmodern literature and art. He is interested in both poetry and prose, and in general one can assert that Rancière utilises a concept of politics that means he regards politics and literature as parts of a constantly on-going creation of and struggle concerning the ways in which the sensual and the sayable, words and things, are connected with each other — politics and literature take part in a struggle concerning the entire social picture.

Politics is first of all a way of framing, among sensory data, a specific sphere of experience. It is a partition of the sensible, of the visible and the sayable, which allows (or does not allow) some specific data to appear; which allows or does not allow some specific subjects to designate them and speak about them. It is a specific intertwining of ways of being, ways of doing and ways of speaking. The politics of literature thus means that literature as literature is involved in this partition of the visible and the sayable, in this intertwining of being, doing and saying that frames a polemical common world. (Rancière10)

Rancière conceives art and literature as possible contributions to the break with consensus and with the regulation by those in power of the material world. It is the combination of art’s possibility to appear detached from other social interests and its use of language in a broad sense that makes it important in emancipatory processes. Writers and artists have the possibility to change the frames through which we perceive the material world. Writing fiction is reframing the real, building

up new relations between individual and collective, but, it should be noted, from a non-dominant societal position, where art can free itself from links to other social interests than itself as art. Thereby, modern literature has a special possibility to create dissension.

So it is not the manufacturing of images of reality by literature that makes it involved in politics; it is on the contrary the possibility it has via language to introduce phenomena into a common social space that creates the relation between politics and literature. Politics is a process of upsets, one in which interests and phenomena are brought out into the light. Literature is part of this process, because it has to do with anything at all that can be said and shown.

Political Welfare Rhetoric

The actual term welfare state emerges in Social Democratic language when the prime minister, Hans Hedtoft, uses the concept “the governed-by-the-people welfare state” in the debate book *Mennesket i Centrum* [The Human Being in Focus] (Hedtoft 7).³ Here, inspired by the British political discussion of welfare ideas, he combines the Old Norse word welfare with a concept of the state. The word welfare has a long literary history in such writers as Holberg, Brorson, Ewald, Hans Christian Andersen and Grundtvig, who, in accordance with common language usage at the time, used the word in connection with the well-being, happiness, progress and good conditions of the individual both while in earthly life and beyond. Now the concept is linked to the state in a way already prepared for by the philosopher Harald Høffding in his critical discussion in 1889 of Brandes’ Nietzsche-inspired thoughts concerning so-called aristocratic radicalism, in which individualists seeking freedom and intellectuals were to ensure the future for the many. Harald Høffding here formulates his ‘democratic radicalism’ as a diametrical opposite to Brandes’ ideas. Democratic radicalism is to ensure the welfare and good life of all. But Hedtoft goes all the way that lies just in front of Høffding. Hedtoft links the welfare concept — or the welfare principle, as Høffding calls it — by adding state organisation.⁴

The political framing of the concept welfare and welfare state that Hans Hedtoft introduced means that the concept of welfare today most often refers to something people have in common. If the politicians talk about “welfare,” “more welfare” or “lasting welfare,” they do not mean the possibility of well-being and security for the individual in his or her personal life but the share of the individual in the common welfare — or common welfare pure and simple. Thereby, the welfare concept comes to form what George Lakoff calls a deep frame

in the Danish political debate,⁵ even though the political ideas about the paths to welfare often go in highly different directions and the actual concept of the welfare state can also change meaning and character depending on its context (Petersen, “Velfærdsstaten i dansk politisk retorik” 23).

In the mid 1950s, the concept of the welfare state was on the way to becoming a negative framing in the political debate. The Conservative opponents of the welfare policy used the concept “guardian state” (≈ nanny state), the term first being used in 1956 by the Conservative Poul Møller as a criticism of the consequences of Social Democratic policy regarding the welfare state.⁶

The guardian concept was thematised in literature by Villy Sørensen in his *Formynderfortællinger* (*Tutelary Tales*, 1964). He deals with the guardian principle from psychological, religious, existential, social and political angles. His tales deal, among other things, with states and societies that assume the role of guardian of their citizens, since the citizens are either deprived of or themselves renounce their personal and social freedom and responsibility, after which a dreary conformity and orthodoxy is victorious. Villy Sørensen himself claimed that he definitely had not depicted present-day society (Clausen 30) but to a greater extent had shown that social development acquires its own negative logic unless people personally develop.

The point of the tales, in this optic, is that the dawning welfare state could end up as being a guardian-like control system if people are unable to develop psychologically. The negative political framing of the welfare state by the Conservatives lost ground during the expansion of the welfare state in the 1960s, but it is still occasionally used, for example by several politicians from Venstre, the right-wing liberal party in Denmark.⁷ In the mid 1960s, the deep framing of the welfare state starts to work, with certain core metaphors becoming distinct and influencing the political rhetoric of the other parties.

On the threshold of the 1970s, when the development of the welfare state culminates, the welfare state in Social Democratic rhetoric starts to appear as an architectural construction, a “folkhem” (home for the people) as the welfare state is called in Sweden. This home is without “class barriers,” and where “reforms” and “security” can be implemented.

So we are dealing here with a spatial pattern of metaphors, where the welfare space is opposed to the “society of lack” that many Danes knew from the post-war period.⁸ In its 1973 working plan, the Social Democrats thoroughly described the “safety net” that was to be constructed under citizens in “the modern welfare society.”⁹ The house metaphor is not substantial, but it forms a clear metonymic

basis in the imagery used, and it has a reference back to the biblical metaphoric of the house and the temple building that was used in the labour movement songs from the end of the 19th century, where for example Ulrich Peter Overby made use of biblical expression when writing about the new society as “a strong house we build to protect us in need” (Overby 1871).

The right-wing liberal party, Venstre, had also started to adopt the welfare concept. In 1969, Venstre talked about replacing “the cold society” by a “human society of well-being,” and it quickly transpired that the welfare idea was linked to the idea of new building in the form of modern villages or single-family residential areas that ought to be spread out around the country, cf. the party programme *Frem mod år 2000* [*On towards the year 2000*]. For Venstre, the core metaphor of the welfare state is not a functionalistic rented dwelling but a single-family house by the village pond.

In 1973, a crucial general election took place, with the old established parties and their welfare ideas being challenged by various new parties. The so-called “Single-Family Party,” Centrum Demokraterne, along with the Progress Party, Fremskridtspartiet, got into the Danish parliament. The Centre Democrat Erhard Jacobsen, left the Social Democrats in protest against the party’s policy towards the growing middle stratum of car and single-family-house owners, and the Progress Party rode on a wave of protest against the burden of taxation and the growing public sector of the welfare state.

“The landslide election” quickly became the popular term for the dramatic election which meant that the old parties lost many seats, while the Progress Party at one swoop became the second-largest political party in Denmark.

The “landslide” metaphoric relates to a number of linguistic images that the old parties had liked to use, with such expressions as basis, foundation, reorganisation and expansion had implied the coming into existence of a societal architecture, a building that was safe and secure.

With the “landslide election,” the very basis for the welfare architecture and its cultural landscape seemed to be in danger. The chairman of the Social Democrats, Anker Jørgensen, had to hand over the premiership to Venstre’s Poul Hartling, who in his first New Year Speech in 1974 spoke of a need for a *sanering* (renovation) of the welfare state, which as he interpreted as expressing the will of the people. The Danish word used had definitely been chosen with care: something had to be changed and modernised, but the welfare building was to endure.

The building and space pattern also unfolds in the rhetoric of many of the new right-wing politicians. In the first programme of the Progress Party in 1973 the

concept of “sanering”(renovation) is very central. The Social Democratic society is seen in terms of imagery as being a dilapidated house that needs renovating, and Mogens Glistrup emphasises in a party-political letter to Poul Møller in 1973 that the Progress Party wishes to strengthen “Denmark as a business” and deliver the welfare state and its social “safety net” from the “plethora of paperwork” and “jungle of laws.”¹⁰ We have Glistrup painting on the one hand a horror scenario of an antediluvian despotism of paperwork, and on the other hand a dangerous Social Democratic jungle, an untamed world of nature that threatens the welfare state — a concept that Glistrup in this context completely appropriates to himself.

Even though Glistrup and his Progress Party did not have any major influence on policy, he had captured a political platform in the Danish parliament, and he made use of a political rhetoric that re-echoed in the whole of Danish society, challenging the prevalent, somewhat cautious architectural welfare metaphor, though with a clear reference to precisely core concepts in this metaphoric: the house, path, plot, growth, health and security net.¹¹ Mogens Glistrup thus supplied an almost performative linguistic turn in the political life of the time that had far greater importance than his many political proposals (cf. Kuur Sørensen 104).

Welfare Metaphors at Work

An important feature of the establishment of the welfare state was a dramatic change of the old patriarchal family. A new family structure with two breadwinners out at work, consisting of father, mother and children, rapidly gained ground in Denmark in the period from the 1960s and into the 1970s, and it was supported by legislation and government resolutions concerning maternity leave, family planning, the expansion of day-care centres and care of the elderly (cf. Borchorst 189 ff.). So already in its developmental phase the welfare state is on its way into a societal situation where nothing is given in advance as regards father, mother, grandparents or children. The family becomes a temporary community, loosely connected by sex roles that are also rapidly being reformulated as the state assumes the role of the framework around a security societal family that lives in a “home of the people.”¹²

On the front pages of the Social Democratic programmes one can notice the changes. The picture on an election programme from 1951 shows a mother with two sons and a daughter standing outside their small non-detached, waving goodbye to the father who is off to work. The caption beneath is the word “Security.”

The mother and children belong to the home, but the entire family is in fact on its way out of the terrace house, and the younger girl would clearly like to be off

with her father. The picture looks like an omen that in the generation of the younger girl women too will be part of the labour market, and that the state will come to take over many of the tasks previously taken care of by the patriarchal family. The members of the family are on their way away from each other in various directions: work, school and institution, and the welfare state are to be the secure framework, the pleasant non-detached house that encloses the life of the family.

Sixty years later, the Social Democrats choose a different metaphoric to express their welfare ideals. In their programme of principles from 2011 we see a little girl sitting on a jetty, her face turned away from us, out towards the open sea. She is hugging a doll. She is alone, and the caption just says “hånden på hjertet” (= hand on the heart = in all good conscience, honestly and truly). Here the welfare state is presented as a kind of invisible lifeguard-parent that has taken over responsibility for the individual’s life. The family relations have lost their significance, but the child’s biological parents can rest assured — the welfare state takes care of and watches over every single member of society, like a lifeguard over the little girl on the great jetty of life. The welfare state is not there for families; it is there for each and every citizen. It is no longer presented as a secure single-family house and a cosy societal family but as a surrounding world with opportunities and dangers and as an invisible being that is always there for individuals — the hand that touches the heart.

The changes to family relations were supported by the fact that Denmark, after a municipal reform in 1971, experiences a centralisation of the administrative system of the public authorities and of such welfare institutions as hospitals and schools. The economic crisis, which really accelerates after the major energy crisis that starts in 1974, leaves long-lasting traces through the 1970s and has a profound influence on the development of society up to the turn of the millennium. There are geographical areas and occupations that never recover after the crisis and are gradually phased out. The welfare developments thus also become geographically out of synch with each other. Developments take place more quickly in the major towns than in local areas in the country, but everywhere they are promoted by the idea of growth and development.

The programmes of the political parties around the mid 1970s are full of plus-words relating to well-being, growth and security. *Venstre*’s programme from 1975 has the title “We want to make society warmer” — which could, more or less, also have been said by the *Social Democrats*, if there had not been certain old core metaphors to cultivate, such as “solidarity.” *The Social Liberal Party* [Det Radikale Venstre] stands united under the headline “A step on the way to a better

society.” *The Social Democrats* invite social debate with their motto “Solidarity, equality and well-being”; *The Socialist People’s Party* expresses the wish for “A new development — a new society” (1976), while *The Conservative People’s Party*, also in the mid 1970s, repeats its headline from 1972 “Security in one’s own home.”

Under the influence of the crisis, the *Social Democrats* state that they have recognised “that there are boundaries for growth in quantity. For growth in quality there are no boundaries.” It is here a question of creating “enhanced quality of life.” “security for all” and “a feeling of belonging to society,” also via economic democracy.¹³

The way to growth and well-being takes a different direction with *Venstre*, where the emphasis is on “co-responsibility” and “co-influence” and a strengthening of “the local community” if well-being and growth are to be promoted. It is stressed that the rationalisation of schools, hospitals, transport and police has jeopardised many values. “Did one think of the children’s well-being in the school? Did one think of the increased distance between the patients and their relations? What became of the individual in all this? What became of the joy in working?”¹⁴

The idea of the local community and the values which women’s care of children and the old once represented are eagerly advanced in several of the party programmes. But the point is that the traditional tasks and skills of women as regards the family are now best taken care of by society. Growth and well-being are within all areas conditioned by the development of a close, warm society that may well resemble the old nuclear family, but with the key point that the state has taken the place of the reigning head of the family.

What gender, though, is the welfare state? Is it a father or a mother? As a parent it resembles a *bricolage* of cultural values that relate to both the patriarchal family’s male and female sex roles. It is a commanding and caring construction that can manifest itself both as warm, helping hands, as the far-reaching arm of the law, as the voices of teachers or as an electronic GPS, sewn into one’s clothes, that is to prevent the senile from getting lost from the nursing home.

The relation between citizen and state often has a physical dimension in the form of treatment, care and attention. The individual citizen meets changing representatives of the state, but the welfare state finds it difficult to manifest itself as a unified entity or figure — it is a space or a metonymic pattern: it is hands, voices, text, aids, teaching, treatment and flow of money. The metaphor of the house and the family therefore becomes important for politicians in their

concretisation of the idea of the welfare state. The welfare house and the family of society gather together the metonymy and make the idea visible to citizens.

Kirsten Thorup, Vibeke Grønfeldt and Jette Drewsen work quite deliberately with the special possibility modern literature offers to, on the one hand, imitate all discourses (political, religious, scientific, personal) and, on the other hand, to interpret them in different ways and inscribe them into a special, subjective discourse (cf. Dines 100). In their literary publications there are involved in the many changes to society and culture that take place in the period in which they make their debuts, but the welfare thematic is often not obvious and programmed, as it is in such an older prose writer as Martha Christensen (1926–95), whose debut novel from 1962 *Vær god ved Remond* [*Be nice to Remond*], relates in a simple, somewhat naive realism the story of a mentally retarded boy who is placed in a children's home.

The welfare themes in the three writers and their generation weave in and out of linguistic and aesthetic challenges of contemporary ideas and values, also including the political welfare rhetoric, both the deep framing of the welfare state and the strong patterns of metaphors that emerge to do with house, home, family and growth.

Family, House and Home

Shortly before the important general election of 4 December 1973, which turned the political situation in Denmark upside-down, Kirsten Thorup's debut novel *Baby* was published, which can be read as a linguistic-aesthetic challenging of the welfare metaphoric. The novel did not mark Kirsten Thorup's popular breakthrough, but it is one of the works that has subsequently been the subject of both other writers' interest and intense analysis. Kirsten Thorup says about *Baby*: "The world that the language in *Baby* paints is very fluid and lacks cohesion. It is quite deliberate that there is no difference between whether the book describes a table or a thought, but links all the clauses and sentences with 'and'" (Juhl 102).

Baby is based on the young writer's and young mother's own experience of the Copenhagen precinct of Vesterbro, full of old-fashioned prostitutes and pickpockets, but also typified by slums, crime and hard drugs. It is a social field undergoing a transformation from an almost cosy old-fashioned criminal and slum precinct to a tough urban district populated by the losers and outsiders of the welfare state. The action centres on a circle of people living in this environment. It is a gallery of big-city existences in a social and psychological conflict with themselves and each other. Thorup's novel deals with single parents, petty

criminals, unemployed, abortion-seekers and drug-addicts who are precisely the types who ought to be included in the socialising safety net of welfare legislation, but who apparently fall through the loose mesh, and where at last they are “caught up with,” the help offered seems a parody and frightening.

Thorup emphasises that the description of the characters has almost been stripped of stories about childhood or geographical past. The characters only exist in their now and present habitats; they are without psychological depth and function as mirror for each other.

The focusing of the novel on the present time results in the reader having difficulty in following a temporal progression: it seems as if the time-span of the novel is about a year, around 1971–72. The narrative starts in February, and one can follow a progression up to September and into the winter months, but the sequence is interrupted by illogical jumps between seasons in several chapters,¹⁵ and one soon discovers that place and space are more important for the characters than time. Time is stationary, while place and space bind and hold the characters in a vacuum and interspace between life and death. Place and space are precisely not secure places to stay, but are some sort of non-places the characters move around between without either dwelling or existing there. While the contemporary political rhetoric is overflowing with concepts of a welfare future that is being created and shaped here and now via reforms, time does not make any impact on the universe of the novel. While the political rhetoric implies that ‘in time’ advance and progress comes, time flows without direction and amorphously in Thorup’s novel.

The novel centres on the middle chapter “I Am a Soft Ice, I Am a Tough Guy,” which deals with the antique dealer and money lender Eddy, who the other characters are dependent on. The car salesman Marc owes Eddy money; Marc’s wife — with the car-name Cadett, sleeps with him for money; the gay couple Ivan and Ric are his henchmen and gorillas; Leni, who earns money from translating porno, is his former wife; the single mother Karla with the boyfriend, the upper-class boy David, rent one of his slum properties; the transvestite Jolly Daisy appears in the club milieu that Eddy frequents and meets a number of the other characters: the young girl, Nova, who has run away from home; and the dishwasher, Susi, who is in love with David and becomes a “gay-mother” for Ric and Ivan.

Eddy is a kind of criminal “spider” who holds the others caught in his web of power, violence and money. He is the patriarch in a criminal parallel society beyond the law and order of the welfare state. The paradox, however, is that the welfare state makes use even so of Eddy’s power and his unscrupulous property speculation.

The welfare institutions make their appearance in the universe of the novel when Marc, hopelessly in debt after having lost his job, and his wife decide to move into The Men's Home (an institution where men with problems can spend the night free of charge), an organisation to help drug addicts, and then Nova and Sonja murder a random car-driver and end up at a rural borstal, the human climate of which proves to be as cold as ice, despite the beautiful farming idyll with animals and fields. The welfare institutions that ought to help to bring people back into secure frameworks actually keep their clients on the periphery of society, and with a view of an abyss.

The flat that the state eventually offers the single mother Karla is a parody of a dwelling — it is unhealthy, dilapidated, a pure slum dwelling that ends up causing the death of Karla's daughter — it also happens to be owned by the villain Eddy.

The novel does not apportion guilt or responsibility — it blames neither society nor individuals, but shows the welfare society to be an ambiguous structure in which people try to survive by establishing, for better or for worse, human relations and a "family." The welfare institutions, however, undermine precisely these relations, since they strive to take over the role of the family and place themselves in its stead. So the institutions take measures against the makeshift families that the characters attempt to form. The characters are admittedly included in the country's laws and welfare, but it is precisely these laws and welfare that isolate them from each other and banish them to the periphery of society. The welfare architecture is neither secure nor healthy as either a symbolical or physical place to live.

The novel thus assimilates and processes political and socio-analytical discourses in such a way that they are at the same time both used and rejected.

On the basis of Rancière's ideas about literature and politics, one can claim that the novel at the level of form and aesthetics underlines the importance of artistic language as a discourse that can critically interpret the language and concepts of politics and thematise how staple societal metaphors can artistically be challenged.

When the romantic all-mother/all-father/all-baby, the transvestite Jolly Daisy, finally invites the porno translator Leni in to a nativity-play-like scene with night-stars and heavenly peace, Kirsten Thorup attempts in a way to reformulate a biblical metaphoric of the holy family and the child that was born in a manger. One can view this final scene as an allegorical comment on the secure societal family of the political rhetoric, a comment that points out that one has to start right from square one with the biblical metaphoric of the labour movement and also think in

new gender constructions if the societal house is to be built out of closeness and humanity.

Time Creates New Wounds

While Thorup’s characters fight to establish alternatives to both the patriarchal family and the new state welfare’s father-and-mother, Jette Drewsen’s novel *Tid og sted* (*Time and Place*, 1978) tells of a characteristic tendency to drain the family of its functions and tasks in the establishment phase of the welfare state. The novel portrays a group of people — school friends, relations, acquaintances — dipping into various points in time from March 1961 to October 1976.

The family appears as a social relation that is becoming increasingly unstable. It is no longer a rock-solid ‘father house’ that the women fight to break free of.¹⁶

Like Kirsten Thorup, Jette Drewsen challenges a conception of time that moves forwards and brings progress with it, as she breaks down the traditional chronology of the novel: she starts with an account of the characters in April 1974 and then moves back to March 1961, followed by March 1966 and October 1968. The final chapter can be dated to October 1976. In the course of the almost fifteen years a number of the characters have become parents, but the family structure that they themselves have experienced as children is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. Their own parents have become old age pensioners who arrange their lives and speak in a way that the family’s grandchildren simply cannot comprehend. The social and cultural development creates a language gaps that kept people apart from each other.

Jette Drewsen portrays various variations of the new family relations in the novel: a middle-class married couple (the doctor Ejvind and the doctor’s secretary Elise) with half-adult children, on their way towards infidelity and divorce; a working-class family (the checkout assistant Ingrid and the taxi chauffeur Niels), who stay together despite the man’s infidelity; a lesbian university teacher (Helle), who lives on her own; a young unemployed academic woman (Birgitte), who moves into a commune with her child and deselected her child’s father; a woman journalist (Laila), who when very young had an abortion without her parents knowing about it, but who as an adult decides to have her child when she becomes pregnant after a one-night stand (with Ejvind) and to find a social father for the child. This she finds in an elderly man who functions as both father, grandfather and child in the family — for as long as it lasts. He is shunted out of the makeshift family rather fortuitously after a somewhat scary “evening at home.”

When Helle and Ejvind’s mother dies, death is not felt to be a striking

or important event by those left behind — it is got over quickly, quietly and anonymously. Helle uses the death as an excuse to visit a female friend she is interested in as a sex partner, while Ejvind takes a sleeping powder. Later, the two intellectual siblings start to ‘theorise’ about the mother’s death, since the actual emotional relation seems to have disintegrated. The daughter-in-law, Elise, feels herself hard-pressed and “deprived of the right to grieve for someone who had been close to her” (Drewsen 173).

In the course of the 15 years covered by the novel, the single, divorced parent becomes a characteristic figure, and those who do not get divorced during those 15 years weigh up their situation and think about a possible way out of the “decorative family” (Drewsen 177).

Emotionally, however, the characters have come to a standstill: they are caught in the childhood they never managed to round off, because the development of welfare got rid of childhood’s form of the family “overnight,” so to speak, before they were ready to take over control of their lives themselves, and they still miss their parents as parents. Their hold a field of possibility open, rather than assume the role of responsible participants in close human relationships.

Nothing is sure any longer except the need of the individual for a closeness and intimacy that no longer has a social space. It is a difficult project to constantly have to balance the family relationship and one’s own role.

The individual breaks free of the family ties that have limited people morally and socially, but the emancipated life is full of emotional costs and restlessness. And at such a time of upheaval, it is not really acceptable to be content with one’s life, one’s husband and one’s children. The checkout assistant Ingrid is almost ashamed about still being in love with her husband. She feels it is problematic that she has no desire to liberate herself, and that she tolerates his relationship with other women.

As a counter-image to the imploding family there is the depiction in the middle of the novel of women’s lives in a high-rise block of flats where some of the characters live for a while. The women meet in the wash house in the basement where they exchange their experiences with and of children, marriage and work. They are on maternity leave, are housewives or have half-day jobs, and in that way are neither submerged in family life or work. There is a kind of “ritual intimacy” (ibid 107) between the women of an almost mythical nature. “The women at the well” is the archaic title of the chapter about the wash house.

One can draw a parallel between this scene and the image of the holy family at the end of Kirsten Thorup’s novel *Baby*, although the conception of the alternative

to the imploded family in Drewsen has a form closer to reality and links up with ideas in contemporary housing.

The high-rise block becomes a small welfare idyll where, even if one does not “matter to each other,” one is at least able to behave humanely, considerately and empathetically. The actual form of housing with flats makes it possible for the women to pop into each other’s homes and share washing machines in the basement. This social mixing promotes conversations, and on the day in 1966 that the chapter describes there is a TV transmission of the wedding of the Dutch crown princess to a German. Here the state even displays a human face, with the pictures of a young successor and her husband to be!

The women use the TV broadcast as an occasion to talk about their own weddings, their married lives and their children. The newly married Elise does not join them in the TV room to begin with, but manages even so to ask the more experienced women about “additions to the family” during their time together in the basement wash house. “Yes, but when it’s suddenly there like that, a child you’ve not known before at all, can you actually find time for it and afford it? — Tell me, have you got into trouble or something, Ingrid said and laughed. — Well, not trouble exactly, I’m married after all, but. — Are you quite sure? — Not completely. And it wasn’t precisely the idea. — It’s very rarely precisely the idea, Margit said” (Ibid 100). The description of the child as a stranger who disturbs the relationship between man and woman displays the challenges brought about by the new aspects of married life.

The intimacy between the women is greater than between spouses, even bosom friends will not share everything. Margit declares that she stays with her husband because she can’t be alone; Ingrid recalls her first boyfriend and would like to meet him again, but enjoys her husband, Niels, also sexually, and thinks that he resembles the bridegroom in the TV wedding. The chapter about the women at “the well” sketches a small welfare idyll where the women are neither condemned to loneliness, the twosomeness of marriage or the patriarchal family. But the idyll is only a “breather” between the many changes taking place in society and the family.

When Laila becomes pregnant, she manages without her family’s knowledge or help from her boyfriend to get an abortion based on her mental condition — the novel takes place long before the introduction of free abortion. The meeting with the hospital is as cold as ice — and the staff is full of hypocrisy. Everyone knows why Laila has been admitted — because she wants an abortion — but officially it is classified as pelvic infection. She is referred to a male psychiatrist, a consultant doctor who interrogates her in an insulting way about her sexual habits while

putting on a smiling face and suggesting they use first names. He finally speeds up the conversation; after interesting details about condoms and pubic hair all he wants to do is get the “case” over and recommend an abortion:

The consultant doctor asked, more quickly now, the patient answered also quickly, he asked what she felt when she saw a pram, she answered insecurity and despair, he asked what she had thought in her darkest hours, she answered abortionists and suicide, he asked what she thought when she saw a handicapped child, she answered fright. (Ibid: 69)

Hospital communication demonstrates the incapacity of the professional helpers and their curious looks into a situation in which the family of the young girl is completely absent and is to be kept in the dark about a pregnancy that is regarded as shameful. Later in the novel we see another hospital situation, where the doctor shows a lack of consideration: Gert studies the X-rays of one of his patients, somewhat absent-mindedly, while talking to his mistress.

He leant back slightly and read the name on the case record. Then he looked up at the photos again and said it was a good thing it wasn't someone one knew and was fond of who looked like that inside. There couldn't be long to go now. (Ibid 169)

The welfare institutions, in the optic of the novel, simply lack human qualities and become untrustworthy as replacements for the family in relation to children, the elderly and the sick. In Drewsen, the welfare institutions are male, in the form of doctors who believe they have the power of life and death, although also the women who work in the institutions lack the capacity to care.

The characters do not mature and their welfare lives have to be told piece by piece and divided into short situations and intermezzos. Neither a happy outcome nor a complete tragedy are possible. Life, the changes and difficulties, simply continue year in and year out — strangely endlessly.

The Cost of Growth

While Kirsten Thorup and Jette Drewsen show the schism between disintegrating forms of the family and the emergence of new welfare-institutionised parents, we find the growth metaphoric of the welfare state dealt with, among other things, in Vibeke Grønfeldt's novel *Det rigtige* (*The Right Thing*, 1999), which is a

contemporary novel, written on the threshold of the new millennium. The novel looks both backwards and forwards in time, while telling the story of Ena Jakobsen, who is delivery woman for a laundry in a small peripheral community that is dominated by old people and odd-balls. Ena spends all her spare time maintaining her family’s nursery, which was ruined when the convenience shops started to import vegetables from all over the world on a large scale. Now Ena takes care of the nursery, showing it to people as a kind of museum and cultivating magnificent specimens of vegetables and flowers which she, like some self-appointed welfare worker gives away to the local elderly, weak and various specially selected groups.

Ena has always striven to do things rightly and properly. She was brought up to live up to an ideal of “a nice girl.” “The right thing” represents the good, useful and well-carried-out piece of work; “the right thing” is the moral norms, virtues and rules of rural society in relation to the family, the social community and the female sex. “The right thing” is to contribute actively to the well-being of the family, the maintenance of the community and mastering one’s sex role.”

As a child and teenager, Ena was a competent girl who also managed to keep the nursery afloat economically when her father fell ill and her maternal grandfather had to give up. Now most of Ena’s projects fail, except the nursery museum: here she always keeps abreast of the slightest sign of any decline. Everything is scrupulously ordered and maintained. Ena gets one step ahead of the inevitable wear and tear of materials: “It became almost better than when it was in use. The wear and tear was less. She could expand. [...] It was all ready for use. All that had to be done was to press a button, her mother said proudly.” (Grønfeldt 23) Ena has become a female inheritor of her ancestors’ dreams of a nursery, but the dreams have been transformed into a museum extravaganza after the changes to social and working life that modernisation and the development of the welfare state have entailed.

The story of Ena ends badly, and it is her anger that takes her over the edge to which she clings.

Ena is angry that the growth which is part of the development of the welfare state has led to the very basis of the family’s existence withering away; she is angry that her proficiency and industry, her loyalty to the “well-mannered school” is not rewarded by the development of society, but instead is punished — even mocked — and her loyalty leads socially to her becoming increasingly isolated. She is angry at being angry, and her anger is hard to place. It is admittedly Ena who shouts and scolds, but the replies and conduct that come from the representatives of the welfare institutions and her work colleagues actually contain an aggression

and anger that hit Ena hard and are felt to be physical violence. Ena is the one who expresses the anger, but she is not the sole cause of it.

Vibeke Grønfeldt develops the anger issue of the novel by introducing some of the core metaphors of the welfare state that deal with growth, development well-being into her universe and by showing them in a critical light.

In the optic of the novel, the welfare system works and yet does not work, for example in relation to Ena's younger brother, Oscar. He is a drug-addict, formerly convicted and mentally ill, and as such has been installed in his own flat and has got a light job at a library. But the welfare system and the male figures of authority lack the human understanding, solicitude and patience that the women exercised in the patriarchal family of the former society. The policeman who comes at the request of the neighbours to make Ena see reason and calm her down does not discover just how bad things are.

The welfare state knows best, but it does not see things particularly clearly when it comes to providing care and security, and refuses to recognise Ena's earnest struggle to retain the values and world of her family. She ought to abandon the nursery, send her mother to a nursing home, get herself a job or apply for social security benefit!

Ena manages to procure a financial help for her nursery by becoming a chauffeur for a laundry that, among other things, serves social clients, and she feels that she is now at last on her way towards what is 'right'. The clean laundry helps to get both the social clients, children, drug-addicts and formerly punished back onto an even keel. "Ena Jakobsen believed in the result of common efforts. Those of the local authorities, police, doctors, school. It is possible, what's right" (Ibid 13). Ena uses her eyes and tells of mishandled children in the homes round about that she gets to see, but the social workers and council workers say they know everything in advance. Her observations are ignored, and she gets the impression that social workers, educationalists and doctors consider her a naive person who is a nuisance. She stops noticing what takes place around her. Only the bitter feelings inside her grow at the same rate as the well-formed apples in her garden.

One can view the two "activities" in Ena's life: the nursery of her childhood and the laundry of her adult life as societal metaphors: the nursery represents the old, patriarchal local community, where time and place, working life and family life were in balance. The nursery is an enterprise with meaningful work assignments and a solid basis of existence for the men, women and children of the family. Furthermore, the nursery contributes to a local division of labour, since it provides the local area with the vegetables, the fruit and the flowers that the more specialised

farms and workmen of the local area do not have time to cultivate themselves. The family works at the nursery in harmony with the seasons and uses nature without exploiting it, even though the use of toxic pesticides starts to increase in the course of Ena’s childhood and adolescence. The father’s illness is also taken care of within the framework of the family, since Ena — as if she was his son — simply takes over his work. This shift in the traditional division of labour between the sexes is marked symbolically by the fact that Ena steps outside the moral order of the local community, becomes sexually active while unmarried — even pregnant. She manages discreetly to get a half-illegal abortion carried out by the local doctor. The change in the sex roles gives her a certain power over her own body, but also increases the possibility of her inflicting pain and suffering on herself. The increased use of toxic pesticides in the nursery, the protracted illness of the father and Ena’s sexuality and abortion are thus signs that neither the old sex roles nor the old order of society can be maintained.

The warm, close, responsible and solitary growth society, where the female caring assignments are to be society’s responsibility and that politicians spoke of in the early 1970s when Ena was young, wither with the increasing centralisation and the economic interventions that comes with the expansion of the welfare state. The productive ‘greenhouse’ is replaced by the servicing and universalistic welfare laundry, whose rationalised services can be accessed by both the doctor’s family and the social clients — their economic capacity being duly taken into account, it should be noted. But the laundry only provides “surface treatment.”

When Ena’s anger finally overpowers her, she burns the nursery down to the ground. She is given a suspended sentence, and the welfare state steps in, as Ena and her mother are placed in sheltered housing. “Now she is safeguarded and only needs to choose the right thing and do the right thing” (Ibid 307). But “the stillness fills up with meaninglessness. Or the meaning is emptied and echoes in the late afternoon when the postman has driven past” (Ibid 311).

In the concluding chapters of the novel, Ena takes to the bottle, is raped and ends up being pumped out with a broken arm and in the course of her confused downward spiral she passes a large boulder in the breakers. She embraces the stone and suddenly feels understood, believed in and remembered.

The image does not imply any redemption or release, but if Ena has not got solid ground under her feet, she has at least a very hard stone in her embrace. The story of Ena has comprised the elements: earth (the nursery), water and air (the laundry) and fire (the burning down of the nursery). The stone, as an old, volcanic material, unites all the elements, and the concluding images give the

novel a symbolic touch that underlines the fact that it is not exclusively a realistic analysis of society but a complex artistic image of the uncertain feelings that are also connected to life and sex when placed under pressure by the development of a modern society.

The novel does not idealise the old local society with the nursery as a lost paradise, a societal Garden of Eden; it captures Ena in a number of strong glimpses in which we perceive both the hard toil of the old world and the just as hard emancipation of the individual in the new world.

In the novel, Vibe Grønfeldt rejects an idealisation of the past or a mythologizing of an evil and ramshackle present, where it is a shame for the peripheral areas, for women and the elderly; but she *is* interested in how anger comes into being and is fuelled when Ena is unable to find her rightful place in life, and when her self-observations cause her both to grow to giant size and to shrink to absolutely nothing. Grønfeldt gives this imbalance and this anger a voice, showing it to be a force that grows out of what, unstated, has disappeared during the development of the welfare society and its adaptation to economic crises.

In Vibeke Grønfeldt, the explanations cannot be pushed on the back burner, and the language of the novel becomes as restless and anxious as the characters themselves: Ena's life cannot be reduced to an effect, but not be summed up in other ways either. The descriptions both conceal and reveal other meanings all the time.

Two different types of art are mentioned in the novel: the recent arrival Edel Borg's complete failure of a performance of sections of West Side Story and La Traviata and Schubert lieder, and the virtuoso performance by the singer Marianne Berg of extracts of Verdi in the church. The two types of singing complement each other as an image of the fact that art may stretch from *bel canto* to shrieking and squalling if it is to approach the human and be open for interpretation. And it is quite characteristic that the two types of art are executed by women — it is the female sex that is placed under the severest pressure by the new welfare life, and that therefore calls for artistic interpretation.

The women end up by carrying out a self-annihilating gesture in maintaining a social order that, with far too little success, took over their responsibility and tasks in the family, in the name of progress, emancipation and welfare.

The welfare state itself appears at the end of the novel as steps, voices, friendly hospital orderlies and friendly helpers with nice, shiny trays with food in the sheltered housing. The welfare state is anonymous metonymic remains of something that has gradually become rather indefinably human.

The helping hand, which is one of the welfare state’s strongest metonymies and which has been used both in connection with health campaigns and protests against reductions of social benefits, is here shown in its anonymity and its difficulty in trying to be caring and considerate.¹⁷ From her sheltered housing, Ena has a view of a field where in time more social housing is going to be built: she is quite literally becoming hemmed in by welfare.

But then she nevertheless finds the great fairytale stone at the end of the work, and this is perhaps precisely what she is need of. To embrace something large and incomprehensible, the cold stone from the beginning of time brings a peace to her body that Ena has not known before. The semantic universe of the novel thus opens out towards what is uninterested, untold and uncertain from a human and social point of view. The art of novel writing continues.

The novels *Baby*, *Tid og sted* and *Det rigtige* are examples of how the linguistic framing of the welfare state and its metaphorical patterns are investigated and challenged in some of the most important oeuvres of the welfare period. As an extension of the ideas of Jacques Rancière about literature and society, one can claim that the three novels bring phenomena to do with the change of the family and the cost of growth into a common social space and help to make a critique of the core metaphors of political language sayable and audible.

Notes

1. Cf. Hjordt-Vetlesen (2002), Zeuthen (2008), *Passages* special issue on Kirsten Thorup, no. 56, 2006. Various dissertations were also written which dealt with the authorship of Jette Drewsen, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, e.g. Munch-Hansen (1999)
2. The linguistic framing of the welfare state is discussed in the political debate book *Velfærd tur-retur. Efter socialdemokratismens sammenbrud (Welfare here and back. After the collapse of Social Democracy, 2005)*, in which Niels Lillelund in the article “Social Democratic language” proposes that the whole Danish language has been influenced by the Social Democratic framing of the welfare state. Social Democratic language has removed the welfare state from reality and made the word “social” an absolute password that all parties have adopted” (Lillelund 2005: 24).
3. For a more detailed account of the history of the welfare concept see Petersen 2002: 15 ff.
4. Cf. Anders Thyrring Andersen, who in the article “The dialogic-religious welfare principle in Harald Høffding, Ole Sarvig, Martin A. Hansen, Peter Seeberg and Svend Åge Madsen,” Andersen 2011, has provided a detailed analysis of the discussion between Brandes and Høffding as well as of the importance of the welfare concept in Høffding.
5. “These (deep frames) are the most basic frames that constitute a moral worldview or a political

philosophy. Deep frames define one's overall "common sense." Without deep frames, there is nothing for surface frames to hang on to. Slogans do not make sense without the appropriate deep frames." (Lakoff 2006: 29)

6. Cf. *ibid.* and cf. Madsen 2006: 107, who bases himself on Klaus Petersen's studies.

7. The politicians Karsten Lauritzen and Kristian Pihl Lorentzen have both used the concept on their websites.

8. Cf. The Social Democrats' party programme. *Det nye samfund – 70'ernes politik vedtaget af den 30. kongres* [The new society – policy for the 1970s, approved by the 30th congress] 1969.

9. Cf. The Social Democrats: *Work programme 1973*.

10. The letter has been published at the website of The Royal Danish Library: http://www.kb.dk/image_client_static/default/viewer/?viewerPagesUrl=online_master_arkiv_2/nonarchival/PLG/Partiprogrammer/fremskridtpartiet/fre19731/&viewerPgNumber=0&viewerR2L=false#

11. In connection with the research project Velfærdsstatens sprog og begreber [The language and concepts of the welfare state], led by Klaus Petersen, SDU (2010-2014), Lasse Horne Kjældgaard has discussed the house and the path as basic welfare state metaphors; I have contributed to the further analysis of these metaphors and would underline that they have roots in the Social Democratic biblically coloured metaphors from the end of the 19th century. The political rhetoric revolves round these metaphors, also when such concepts as basis, structure, common property, expansion, health, well-being and care are included.

12. For a more detailed account of changes to the family structure during the development of the welfare state, see: Christoffersen 2004. Here it states: "The censuses and the later occupational statistics combined with the statistical umbrella surveys have made it possible to follow developments within this area. By the nature of things, one will be inclined to underestimate the extent of the housewife role in such surveys because a large number of women can have been housewives for shorter or longer periods without that being the case on precisely the day they were interviewed. From 1940 to 1965, almost half the women between 15 and 74 were full-time housewives on the day of the survey. This share then dropped sharply. In 1990, housewives only made up 5% of the same group of women on the day of the interview.

In 1960, one can observe a very clear tendency for large numbers of women to stop being engaged in active employment at about 25, i.e. when they start to have children [...]. While two thirds of the 20-year-olds were in active employment, only one third of the 30-years-olds were back in 1960. This pattern has changed completely 25 years later. Firstly, the 25-30 year-olds have a very high level of active employment, almost 90%. In the age groups where the women have young children, they maintain a high level of active employment in 1985. 15 years later, the picture has changed, since a considerably larger percentage of the young women under 30 are still in education or training. So the figure for 2000 is considerably lower for the extremely young

women than was the case around 1985.” (Christoffersen 2004: 130).

13. Cf. The Social Democrats, *Solidarity, equality and well-being*, 1975: 9.

14. Cf. Venstre, *We want to make society warmer*, 1975: 2

15. Susanne Pedersen emphasises these chronological breaks in her analysis of *Baby*. (Pedersen 1997: 37 ff.).

16. The concept refers to the depiction by female writers of marriage and the family in the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century; the expression comes from the Swedish writer Fredrika Bremer and is the title of Vol. II of *Nordisk kvinde litteratur historie*, [*The History of Nordic Female Literature*] 1993, <http://nordicwomensliterature.net/>, 2010.

17. See for example the use by Tønder Municipality of the hand as a metonym in its approach to elderly citizens who are in need of personal help and care: <http://www.toender.dk/Borger/Aeldre/Personlig-og-praktisk-hjaelp.aspx>

In connection with protests against welfare cuts in 2007, social and health workers used the hand as a poster with the text ‘L <http://www.foa.dk/Global/News/Forbundsnyheder/Forbundsnyheder/2012/Oktober/Sosu-ere-er-ikke-de-eneste%20varme>

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