

Nomination speech for the Nordic Council Literature Prize



Stigninger og fald (Rise and Fall)

172 pages.

Rosinante 2010

Josefine Klougart's (b. 1985) debut novel *Stigninger og fald* is not a novel in the traditional sense, where the reader has to look for the story and the plot. It is instead a novel which forms a linguistic space that the reader can step into. But at the same time, this linguistic space refers to a real place and a real time, describing in all its complexity a childhood on Mols during the 1980s and 1990s. The protagonist of the novel, the first-person narrator, is called Josephine like the author. She is growing up in a family with a father and a mother and her two sisters, one older and one younger – and equally important, also the horse Molly, which she welcomes at the beginning of the novel and loses again at the end of the novel.

The novel consists of short paragraphs that are not tied together by chronology, but rather stand on their own as intense moments carried forward by the transcending nature and cognitive density of the senses. The individual sentences are woven together with great certainty – which unite with the individual paragraphs and form the whole which is the book. It has been a

long time since Danish has been written so beautifully, with such musicality and such authority both rhythmically and imagery-wise. This imagery is central to the novel's poetics.

Ms. Klougart writes in associative chains of comparisons and avalanches of metaphors which lead to new metaphorical sequences. Each part of these image chains carries equal weight; actually the simile does not explain the first link; it expands the space in which both parts exist, leaving room for yet another expansion in a third link. The compositeness is the innermost characteristic of the moment, of every moment, and it is the desire of this novel to find a language of the moment, the important thing here and now, childhood – or any phase of life – that continuously is in focus.

The novel's motto is William Carlos Williams' famous poem about the red wheelbarrow, on which so much depends. The accurately sensed wheelbarrow, which on the surface is not significant, but which precisely in all its generality, linguistically sensed, becomes significant. It is in the language that this significance arises. So it is in Josephine Klougart's novel. The meaning – the moving rises and falls – take place in a linguistic landscape.

This linguistic wave is formed after a modernist stream of consciousness, but it is independent, it has its own tone, and finds its own way to name "all that which has a life of its own" (p. 41). And everything is seen through an outer as well as an inner vision, with the exact place – Mols – as a poetic anchorage. The novel puts words to lists of things and moments in the world; it points out calmly and gently, "that lists are important, not why they are important but simply that they are." (p. 103).

In this novel there are passages in which the language sounds like language itself, as if deep inside itself it carries an insight that cannot be rewritten or retold, but only experienced through these very sentences. This is what characterizes the classical works as we know them from our greatest poets, most notably JP Jacobsen. As illustrated by the introduction to the funeral description (p. 131): "Besides heather there are roses, besides roses and heather there is my mother's brother, Anders, who plays the violin in church."

"It's all very unsentimental," we are told (p. 137) when the message about Molly's worn-down knee is delivered. "It's bone against bone, I can understand. So I nod. This is how it has to be." Death's presence. Among humans and among animals. Death's inevitability and the language's sober embrace of the terms, and until death, life's intensely experienced moments, to contain it. That is the project of this novel.

You can read *Stigninger og fald* on several levels. If you are sensitive to linguistic articulation, it will take your breath away; if you are the cool intellectual looking for inner structure, you will start to feel, and if you are the blind reader forging ahead, you will begin to see.

Asger Schnack