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Between two media: Merete Morken Andersen's novel *Hav av tid* and its adaptation to an audio-book

Just as Morken Andersen had handed in her manuscript (in 2002) for her new novel, *Hav av tid*, to be published by Gyldendal,¹ a real news story, the so-called “Benedictesaken” broke in Oslo: A young girl, Benedicte Maxwell Iversen had committed suicide and no one could explain why: “1. april [2002] forsvant Benedicte Maxwell Iversen. Hun var en av de vel 500 som hvert år begår selvmord i Norge. Tilbake sitter familie og venner med ett spørsmål: Hvorfor?”² And her mother cannot understand why her daughter killed herself: “Jeg spør og spør, men vi vet ikke, og vi kommer vel aldri til å få vite.”³

This case was discussed at length in the Norwegian press, and Morken Andersen's novel struck a chord with its readers, as it came out while the Benedicte case was still in the limelight. *Hav av tid* was received exceedingly well both by the public and the critics, and she was awarded the prize “Kritiker-prisen” for it in 2002. An excellent 3-CD “lydbok” [audio-book] recording was dramatized by Morken Andersen herself and produced by Grethe Berge as a radio play for Norsk Rikskringkasting [Norwegian Broadcasting] in 2003.⁴ The novel has also appeared in English (2004) as *Oceans of Time*, translated by Barbara Haveland.⁵ Why this popularity? There are definitely parallels between the real case of Benedicte's suicide and the suicide described in Morken Andersen's novel: In both cases, there is no obvious reason for the suicide. Apparently well adjusted young women seem to take their own lives one day, with no explanation.

In this paper, I'll compare two versions of *Hav av tid*: the original novel published in 2002 and the audio-adaptation published in CD format the following year. The audio-version was first broadcast in seven episodes on Program 2 of Norsk Rikskringkasting in the spring of 2003, between March 2 and April 13, and then again in the

summer of the same year, between June 29 and August 10. According to an NRK website dated February 19, 2003, Morken Andersen practically rewrote her novel for the radio version. She is quoted on this website as having said that

Det har vært litt av en job! Det har blitt mye arbeid på tider der normale folk sover søtt i sengen. Men på den andre siden var det en stor utfordring å skulle skrive boken om til radio-episoder, som jo også bør kunne høres som en helhet i seg selv.⁶

It is customary that audio-books do not necessarily follow the book script exactly. This is also the case here. The book is 335 pages long and the 3-CD version is 3 hours and 13 minutes in duration. The book in its entirety cannot be read aloud, let alone be performed by the three actors involved⁷ in the radio play, in this short span of time. Morken Andersen does use large chunks of her novel verbatim, though, tying the radio episodes together with brief summaries. I intend to examine which parts she considered to be essential to her story and which parts she left out of the audio-adaptation – and the significance of these choices.

The content of the original novel (2002) is structured as follows:

	Pages
[Epigraph: Mozart's letter to his father].....	7
Ebba og Erlend	9
Johan sier	21
Judith sier	133
Historien	203
Brevet	295
Det hvite rommet (largo).....	303
[Postscript: "Dream a Little Dream of Me"]	335

The first chapter (Ebba and Erlend – there are no chapter numbers) briefly provides the reader with the setting of the novel followed by a matter-of-fact description of Ebba's suicide. A little later we hear about Erlend, her boyfriend, who found her.

The two large parallel chapters, "Johan says" and "Judith says," which take up about half of the novel, are devoted to the reaction of the divorced parents to their daughter's suicide: a coming to terms with this suicide, one parent at the time. The "story" chapter brings the two divorced parents together in their grief and their attempt to explain

and overcome their daughter's death. The three chapters involving the parents thus take up the lion's share of the original novel, 270 of its 335 pages.

Following the chunk devoted to the parents, the reader is given access to the letter that Ebba wrote to her stepsister, 3½-year old Jennifer, the night before her suicide. The parents are not supposed to read this letter. It is not for them. Rather, it is intended for Jennifer, Ebba's stepsister, when she turns sixteen. And we are back with Ebba's parents and stepmother Minna in the final chapter, on the morning of Ebba's funeral.

The novel begins with an epigraph: Mozart's letter to his father dated April 4, 1787, in which Mozart tells his father that he is grateful that he has "had the opportunity" to become acquainted with death, and that he does not fear death.⁸ This letter has not been included in the audio-adaptation, but the beginning bars of the overture to Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute* is the first thing the listener will hear after the announcement that this is disc 1 of the 3 CDs.

In the audio-adaptation, the very first page of the first chapter of the novel is read in its entirety, practically verbatim, in the narrator's voice. It serves as an introduction to the radio play. Similar introductions follow for all seven radio episodes – each a little different as they also serve as brief summaries of the action as the listeners are moving ahead in the narrative.

The very first page of the novel proper consists of a general description of people moving around inside their homes on this particular summer evening, but "[d]et er ingen her som vet hva som skal skje i ett av disse husene i morgen tidlig."⁹ This paragraph also introduces the play on the CD version at the same time as Mozart's overture is being heard in the background during this entire passage.¹⁰ Actress Andrea Braein Hovig narrates this paragraph. She is also the actress who gives voice to the Ebba character in the audio-version. The nice summer weather described in the novel, and also read verbatim on the CD, has no overtones whatsoever of sadness, terror, impending disaster, or the like, that one might have expected when a suicide of a 16-year old girl is on the horizon.

On the next page of the novel, we meet 16-year old Ebba. The reader has no idea yet that this is Ebba's last morning, the morning she commits suicide. The narrator describes, in a matter of fact tone, how Ebba gets up this morning, washes her face, gets dressed, takes a rope out of the car, crosses over the fence to the woodlands between her home and the cemetery; how she finds the old hut, pushes a tree stump (club house chair) under the thick branch of the large spruce

next to the hut, throws the rope over the branch, ties a knot,¹¹ puts her head inside the loop – and jumps with her eyes open.¹² The narration is very matter of fact, with no apparent emotional content, no hint at all of a suicide approaching, no discussion, no weighing of any *pros* or *cons* for contemplating such an act. Only the first sentence of the suicide paragraph itself is included on the CD,¹³ maybe because this description of the suicide was considered to be too explicit for a radio play, especially in view of the recent Benedicte-case.

Instead of having a major section devoted first to Johan's and then to Judith's thoughts, as was done in the book, the audio-adaptation often mixes the two in order to have Johan's and Judith's thoughts and feelings reflect on one another in a more dramatized fashion than the narration in the original novel provided. This has been done very skillfully. What is interesting to me, is what has been left out of the audio-version. In the written novel, Morken Andersen devotes a good deal of space to Johan's musings about the evening courses he is taking at the university: courses on Greek mythology. He is particularly interested in the Eleusian mysteries and the fertility myth of Demeter and Persephone. Johan explains it like this to his daughter:

Bakgrunnen for de elevsinske mysterieritene er myten om Demeter og Persefone. Demeter er fruktbarhetsgudinnen, moren som mistet sin datter, Persefone, ned til dødsriket. Det kom en ung mann og røvet datteren med seg, hun ble giftet bort til kongen der nede, og slik ble hun de dødes dronning. Men Demeter sørget slik over datteren at alt liv stoppet opp, ingen ting ville vokse, og det ble uår i verden. Hun stengte seg inne i huset sitt og nektet å komme ut før datteren ble brakt tilbake. Det må vel kunne kalles en slags sørgestreik. Til slutt måtte Zevs gi etter for denne ubøyelige sorgen, og sørge for at Persefone ble brakt opp fra de dødes rike igjen, tilbake til moren. Fra det øyeblikket begynte alt å vokse igjen.¹⁴

By far most of these musings on Johan's part about the significance of the ancient Demeter/Persephone myth and its connection to Mozart's *The Magic Flute* via the freemasonry-inspired libretto to this opera, have been left out of the audio-version. Instead, the interaction of, and conversations between mainly Ebba's divorced parents in the few days leading up to Ebba's funeral have been foregrounded in the audio-version.

Much later in the novel Judith, Ebba's mother, attempts to leave her house wearing Ebba's small boots to follow her trail to the place where Ebba killed herself. Judith is convinced that Ebba left her boots on the stairs so that she, her mother, could follow her to the underworld:

Jeg finner henne når jeg går ut i skogen med tauet, sier hun. Hun venter der ute. Det er helt stille der. Alt er klart... Det var noen som røvet henne vekk, hun visste hva som kom til å skje, hun vet slike ting, hun er som meg. Hun har gjort alt klart for meg, støvlene sto der, hun venter på meg. Alt er klart.¹⁵

This means that Judith intends to commit suicide,¹⁶ but Johan prevents it. Johan immediately sees a connection between Judith and the Goddess Demeter who went in search of her abducted (raped) daughter Persephone:

Det er noen som har røvet Judiths prinsesse [Ebba] fra henne og tatt henne med til underverdenen. Og hun har sørget så alt er blitt lagt øde og tørt i landet, ingenting vil vokse. Nabolaget er uten liv, og uten en lyd, alt er så tørt. Dronningen er den rasende Demeter, og nå er hun i ferd med å følge datteren sin for å hente henne tilbake igjen.¹⁷

This passage is also in the audio-version,¹⁸ but interestingly enough, the following sentence spoken by Johan in the book is not on the CD: “Du [Judith] syns at jeg [Johan] har tatt henne [Ebba] fra deg.”¹⁹ Instead, Judith says in the audio-version that Johan left her and Ebba.²⁰ This is quite different. The scene referred to in the audio-adaptation is the one in which Johan had arrived rather late at a school concert where Ebba was performing, but she spotted him at the very end, and somehow he managed to leave the concert with Ebba, something which greatly upset Judith.²¹ The above sentence from the book is a clear reference to the King of the Underworld having taken the Queen’s daughter away to the Underworld. The twist in the audio-version suggests to me that Morken Andersen might not have wanted the association between the mythical, rapist King of the Underworld and Johan to be this much up front in the audio-version. In a word, it is more obvious in the original novel than in the audio-adaptation that Judith regards Johan as the “God of the Underworld” who “abducted” her daughter, and that she is following a Demeter/ Persephone script.

If Johan is the “abductor,” to what “underworld” did he take Ebba? Here we should consider the secret world to which he introduced his daughter, namely to a world of the music of which Judith disapproved, to jazz (Ella Fitzgerald) and folk music, such as the Mamas & the Papas.²² He bought those “low-brow” records in secret, listened to them in secret, and showed this secret to his daughters Ebba, and later Jennifer, while dancing with them, described in passages that have rather problematic overtones – in my view. For example, Johan’s fascination with the song “Dream a Little Dream of Me” is hinted at quite frequently by being

played in the background in the audio-adaptation. This song contains highly suggestive lyrics, such as “say nighty-night and kiss me / Just hold me tight and tell me you miss me ... Still craving your kiss / I am longing to linger till dawn...”²³ In the audio-version we hear these words in the background, actually performed by the Mamas & the Papas.

When remembering his “secret” dancing with Ebba, Johan admits that it did indeed feel as if he had done something wrong. This statement is also in the audio-version:

Og det følte slik den gangen, som det føles nå. Som jeg hadde gjort noe galt. Som om jeg hadde fått et glimt av noe som ikke måtte snakkes om, og som jeg ville blitt anklaget for om det var blitt oppdaget ... Vi [Ebba and Johan] lot som ingenting.²⁴

Johan’s “feeling guilty” about having “done something wrong,” something for which he could be “accused were it to become known,” something that Ebba had to be “silent” about, is described in language that is much too strong to be used about something as innocent as dancing around with one’s daughter. What is Johan talking about here? Just liking music of which Judith disapproves? It is also very significant that this incident (and Johan’s thoughts about it) is stressed both in the novel and in the audio-adaptation.

There are other incidents of this type: of seemingly innocent interactions that may hint at something more sinister, such as a specific episode between Judith and her father, a freemason, in Morken Andersen’s novel. For example, at a New Year’s party when Judith was four years old, her father woke her up at midnight to see the fireworks, and little Judith became utterly upset and began hitting him: “Jeg våknet av at pappa prøvde å trekke luen ned over hodet på meg for å ta meg med ut. Jeg må ha fått et slags raserianfall, jeg begynte å hyle og slå rundt meg ... Jeg slo papa også.”²⁵ The words describing this scene are far too strong for a seemingly insignificant incident. Did Judith’s father have a habit of waking up his daughter in the middle of the night? This scene is also both in the novel and in the audio-version,²⁶ and it is described in words that come very close to sounding like a euphemism for an incestuous relationship.

Just before knocking on Judith’s door the night before the funeral, Johan recalls telling Ebba about *The Magic Flute*, the Eleusian Mysteries, and Demeter and Persephone:

Jeg følte meg veltalende og litt stolt, jeg holdt en kort innføring om det jeg visste om Mozart, frimureriet og innvielsesritualene ved Elevisis. Jeg gjenfortalte myten om Demeter og Persefone, moren som fikk datteren tilbake fra dødsriket fordi hun sørget så insisterende.²⁷

Ebba had tears in her eyes, though, when she listened to the music, and he was standing there in the kitchen looking at her reaction in an almost voyeuristic manner: “det er nesten som i gamle dager, da vi danset sammen i stuen. Du forstår meg.”²⁸ However, maybe Ebba did not appreciate being told all of this. She had wanted to just watch television that evening. She seemed surprised. Maybe this is when she decided she had to leave this world. This is not long before her suicide, and it constitutes the last of Johan’s own recollections in the chapter entitled “Johan says.”²⁹

Why might Ebba have decided to leave the world at this point? Why might Johan’s “lecture” on the connectivity of certain fertility and death rites through the ages had such an effect on her? Johan had linked his “lecture” to his perception that she was too young at sixteen years of age to be dating a boy (Erlend).³⁰ The truth of the matter was, though, that Johan realized that his daughter had been dating Erlend, his fellow student in the philosophy classes, and he did not like it. Erlend was the only student with whom he discussed these lectures dealing with ancient Greek philosophy and myths, such as the Eleusian Mysteries.

But why did Ebba commit suicide? Let us examine the only text from Ebba’s own perspective: her letter to her stepsister Jennifer. This letter was not supposed to be opened until Jennifer herself had turned sixteen years of age. Most of this letter is also read aloud in the audio-adaptation. Ebba expressed her own thoughts to Jennifer, but the only thing she said about a possible reason for her decision to commit suicide was that

[n]oen ganger er det som om jeg står utenfor en glassklokke³¹ og ser inn på de andre. Alle innenfor glasset beveger seg rundt som om ingenting skulle ha skjedd. De ser ut til å ha det greit, som regel. De går i bursdag, snakker sammen, ler og spiser, de bekymrer seg ikke så mye. De tenker, men mest på de samme tingene igjen og igjen. Noen ganger føles det som om jeg aldri skal få slippe inn.³²

And a little later in the same letter, she wrote,

Jeg håper det ikke gjør vondt for deg når du leser dette. Det er så tungt når det gjør vondt hele tiden. Jeg håper du har noen å dele det med, at ikke du også føler at du står utenfor en glassklokke.³³

And

Det er for mye som gjør vondt, lille kylling. Det er for slitsomt å være i det som gjør vondt hele tiden. Det er for mange å passe på, for mange inne i glassklokken, de forstår så lite av det som skjer, de bare fortsetter som før.³⁴

It sounds as if Ebba was depressed and did not feel that she “belonged;” and she did not feel she could talk to anyone about it.

It is interesting to note that the following passages from the letter were not included in the audio-version. In the novel’s letter, Ebba wrote:

Pappa vil helst dele alt med meg. Med deg [Jennifer] også, det kommer du til å merke når du blir litt eldre. Du må passe godt på pappa, han tåler ikke så mye som man skulle tro, og han vet det ikke helt selv.³⁵

And

Jeg har forsøkt å finne ut hvor gamle barn må være for at de skal huske det de opplever når de blir voksne. Jeg har spurt mange om det første de husker, om de husker det som skjedde da de var tre og et halvt [Jennifer’s age when Ebba committed suicide].³⁶

And

Pappa elsker jo barn.³⁷

Were these passages too suggestive of inappropriate conduct to be accepted for the audio-adaptation? The very last words of the novel describe how Johan digs out the secret record of the Mamas & the Papas, lifts up toddler Jennifer from the heap of Ebba’s clothes on the floor, and then dances around with her:

Så går han bort og løfter Jennifer opp fra haugen av [Ebba’s] klær. Hun legger de tynne armene rundt halsen hans og trykker ansiktet mot ham. Hun gråter. Han stryker den ene handen over fløyelsryggen hennes idet han begynner å bevege seg etter musikken. Han synger for henne mens de danser.³⁸

This scene is also at the very end of the audio-version: on the last track of the last CD (III, 23), i.e. it occupies a rather important position. The full text of the song then appears in print – as a postscript – on the next page (335). And in the audio-version, Johan’s singing is gradually taken over fully by the recording of the Mamas & the Papas. It is significant that this is the end of both the novel and the audio-adaptation.

Most of the incidents and quotations referred to above may be found in both the original novel and in the audio-adaptation. This indicates to me that it is important to Morken Andersen to keep the hints at potentially problematic behavioural patterns in both versions. Some readers/listeners might pick up on a more serious, abusive subtext, and

others might not. One component in particular has been changed from the original novel to the audio-adaptation: The inference that Johan represents the mythical, rapist King of the Underworld has been toned down considerably with the removal of most of the references to a connection between the ancient Greek myths of Demeter/Persephone and Mozart's *The Magic Flute*.³⁹ And maybe the audio-version had to be toned down somewhat due to the media's attention to the case of Benedicte Iversen. It was too late to do anything about the original book version – it was already being printed – but the material could still be softened for the audio-version prepared for radio broadcast to a large audience that was still concerned about Benedicte's disappearance and suicide.

Noter

¹ Merete Morken Andersen. *Hav av tid*. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 2002.

² In Toril Grande "Livet etterpå" <http://www.dagbladet.no/magasinet/2002/05/18/331248.html> – published on May 18, 2002. Last accessed Oct 2, 2010.

³ *Ibid.* Furthermore, the autopsy conducted by the Forensic Institute [Rettsmedisinsk institutt] in Oslo concluded "at det ikke er noe som tyder på at det er begått en straffbar handling mot Benedicte Maxwell Iversen" on April 22, 2002, in "Bekrefter det er Benedicte," <http://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/artikkel.php?artid=5708863> – last accessed on Oct. 2, 2010. And "Benedicte Maxwell Iversen, som ble funnet død i Maridalen i Oslo søndag, tok sitt eget liv. Familien er glad for å ha fått visshet, men ser på det hele som uforståelig" *Aftenposten.no* April 22, 2002: <http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/oslo/article317063.ece> – last accessed Oct 2, 2010.

⁴ Oslo: NRK Lydbokforlaget AS, 2003.

⁵ Merete Morken Andersen, *Oceans of Time*, translated from the Norwegian by Barbara J. Haveland, London: Maia Press, 2004.

⁶ "Morken Andersen på øret," in *NRK Kultur*, <http://nrk.no/nyheter/kultur/2544245.html> – last accessed Oct 2, 2010.

⁷ Andrine Sæther, Lasse Kolsrud, and Andrea Bræin Hovig.

⁸ *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 7.

⁹ *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 11.

¹⁰ Lydbokforlaget 2003, CD I, track 1.

¹¹ Ebba's father had taught her a long time ago how to make a sailor's knot on a rope, *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 13.

¹² *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 15.

- ¹³ Lydbokforlaget 2003, CD I, track 2.
- ¹⁴ *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 121. There is no mentioning of the King's raping the daughter of the Goddess of Fertility which occurs in the ancient Greek and Roman myths.
- ¹⁵ *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 250. And Lydbokforlaget 2003, CD II, track 20.
- ¹⁶ *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 253.
- ¹⁷ *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 249-50.
- ¹⁸ Lydbokforlaget 2003, CD II, track 20.
- ¹⁹ *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 252. Judith does not say so directly, she only referring to "noen" and "han" on page 250, but Johan clearly senses that she is really referring to him. On CD III, track 11, Judith does accuse Johan of having taken Ebba away from her.
- ²⁰ Lydbokforlaget 2003, CD II, track 22.
- ²¹ Lydbokforlaget 2003, CD III, track 9.
- ²² A very popular American vocal pop-group in the 1960s and 1970s.
- ²³ Quoted from the postscript of *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 335.
- ²⁴ *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 262 and Lydbokforlaget 2003, CD III, track 8.
- ²⁵ *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 263.
- ²⁶ Lydbokforlaget 2003, CD III, track 2.
- ²⁷ *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 130.
- ²⁸ *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 131.
- ²⁹ Johan tells Judith about this scene on CD III, track 8.
- ³⁰ *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 131.
- ³¹ It is interesting that Ebba feels *outside* the bell jar looking in, whereas Sylvia Plath's Esther in *The Bell Jar* [1963] feels more and more trapped *inside* the bell jar.
- ³² *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 298 and Lydbokforlaget 2003, CD III, track 12.
- ³³ *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 299 and Lydbokforlaget 2003, CD III, track 12.
- ³⁴ *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 301 and Lydbokforlaget 2003, CD III, track 13. It is particularly interesting that Ebba sees as negative people's desire to "just continue to do what they had been doing before," whereas her father Johan specifically wants things to continue as before: "Alt fortsetter" *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 250.
- ³⁵ *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 297.
- ³⁶ *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 299.
- ³⁷ *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 301.
- ³⁸ *Hav av tid*, 2002, p. 334 and Lydbokforlaget 2003, CD III, track 23.
- ³⁹ In his review of the original *Hav av tid*, the late critic Øystein Rotten praised Morken Andersen's mature novel: "Musikk og myter" spiller en viktig rolle som resonansbunn for menneskenes følelser i "Hav av tid". But he warned against "going too far" when interpreting Morken Andersen's use of the Greek myths: "Det gjelder også for de mytiske

referansene, der Demeter, fruktbarhetsgudinnen, hun hvis datter Persefone ble røvet av Hades og ført til underverdenen, står mest sentralt. Andersen utnytter fint tilknytningen mellom Judith og Demeter, og faller ikke for fristelsen til å trekke parallellene for langt.” *Dagbladet.No* June 24, 2002. <http://www.dagbladet.no/kultur/2002/06/24/339655.html> – last accessed Oct. 2, 2010. This quote is significant. Did Rottem himself shy away from “reading too much into the parallels” between the ancient myth of the abduction and rape of Persephone and Johan’s relationship with his daughters? Did the thought occur to him that Morken Andersen might actually be saying more than it would appear on the surface level?