

Visible but Voiceless?

The Afterlife of Dagny Juel Przybyszewska (1867–1901) in Norwegian Literary Culture

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The Norwegian writer and cultural figure Dagny Juel's literary output is small, but rich.¹

A generation younger than the women writers of the "Modern Breakthrough," Juel belongs to European *fin-de-siècle* culture, and there are decadent, vitalist, and modernist traits in her work, as well as a clearly feminine perspective. Her oeuvre consists of four dramas, four prose poems, a short story, and fourteen poems, all written within an aesthetics in which desire, death drive, enigmas, and self-expression merge within a symbolist imagery. If her life had been longer, there is reason to believe that her writing would also have been more extensive, and probably her reputation would have been more clearly that of a writer. Nevertheless,



Fig. 1. Julie Wolfthorn: Portrait of Dagny Juel-Przybyszewska (before 1901). Julie Wolfthorn *Freundeskreis*. <<https://www.berlin.de/aktuell/ausgaben/2007/dezember/ereignisse/artikel.223635.php>>.

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¹ Dagny Juel Przybyszewska has her last name from her Polish husband Stanisław Przybyszewski, and Juel (originally Juell) from her father. Internationally she is most often treated with all three names, but in Norwegian contexts today, the current name form is Dagny Juel. I will therefore follow current Norwegian naming and writing of the patronym in this article.

SILENCED WOMEN AUTHORS OF THE NORDIC AREA (1870-1914)

Dagny Juel's presence in the Norwegian public sphere is greater than her small body of writing would suggest. In 2023 alone, she appeared in Norwegian cultural life on four different occasions, all in major media contexts: a podcast from the National Library (Fjellhøy et al. 2023), a portrait article and attendant podcast by the popular history magazine *Aftenposten Historie* (Skonseng 2023), the feature film *Munch*, about the internationally renowned artist Edvard Munch (Dahlsbakken 2023), and also a new biography about Munch (Figureido 2023). In both the film and biography, it is Juel's relationship with Munch and the artistic milieu they both frequented that make her visible, while the podcasts and the article dwell on her bohemian lifestyle and, above all, her death—how she was murdered by a young admirer in Tbilisi, Georgia. Both podcasts quote a few words by Juel: a couple of lines from her only short story in *Aftenposten Historie*, and some desperate statements from letters to the family in Norway in the podcast from the National Library. The letter quotes are read by a female voice, otherwise her life story, with love and longings, drama and despair, is narrated by male voices. Juel is thus an interesting case for discussing visibility, voice, and the impact of literary history and modern (digital) media culture. Do her dramatic life story and steady media presence overshadow her literary voice and the originality of her work?

The article sets out to explore the afterlife of Dagny Juel in Norwegian literary culture by a mixed method approach. On a macro level, I have carried out N-gram searches in the extensive digitized corpora at The National Library of Norway. Zooming in on elements in the graphs, I have found both expected and surprising connections, as well as central media events, debates and texts for more detailed analysis of context and topics. Juel's position in Norwegian literary history and newer literary scholarship is also examined. Before the analyses, I will briefly present Dagny Juel, her life and work.²

Life and work

Dagny Juel grew up in Kongsvinger, a small-town northeast of Oslo (named Kristiania at the time), together with three sisters. The family was cultured and well-situated, with distinguished lineages on both sides; her father was a district medical officer, and her mother's brother was the Norwegian prime minister in Stockholm. The home became a focal point for many performing artists, and the sisters were accomplished musicians. Piano studies led Dagny first to Kristiania, then to Berlin. In Kristiania she was part of a community of young artists, and when she arrived in Berlin in 1893, her friend Edvard Munch was already there to introduce her to a large Scandinavian and German coterie of painters, musicians, and writers.

² I want to thank the anonymous reviewers for comments and questions that made me clarify certain points in the presentation.

This included the Polish pianist and writer Stanisław Przybyszewski, with whom she fell intensely in love and whom she married after a couple of months. She also had love affairs with other men, and she attracted admirers who later spoke disparagingly of her. In bohemian and culturally avant-garde circles in Berlin and later in Kraków, she was the queen, but also a dangerous *femme fatale*.³

At the same time, Juel was an important cultural mediator in the Scandinavian and European art scene. She facilitated publication of her husband's works and translated into Norwegian works by the Finland-Swedish writer Karl August Tavastjerna and her husband, and a novella by Norwegian poet Sigbjørn Obsfelder into German (Juel 1894, 1895a, 1895b.). In Berlin she played an active role in founding the avant-garde periodical *Pan* and made exhibition contacts for Munch and the prominent Norwegian sculptor Gustav Vigeland. During these hectic bohemian years of revelry, travel, and financial problems, she also began writing literary works of her own and gave birth to two children. In 1901, she was murdered by the young Pole Władysław Emeryk who was infatuated with her, only a few days before her thirty-fourth birthday. This is truly a life story to make her into a myth—or the subject of a podcast—and rumors and statements about her in the writings of Strindberg, Przybyszewski, and other men from her days in Berlin have contributed to this myth. Already among her contemporaries, this interest in her life and fate came to overshadow her texts. There is little reason to doubt that gender is important in this process—she was a central figure in artists' circles, and what was written about her was long motivated by the significance, whether positive or negative, that she had had for bohemian men.

The only works that were published in Norway during her lifetime were the drama, *Den sterkere* [*The Stronger*] in 1896, and four prose poems in 1900.⁴



Fig. 2. Dagny Juel Przybyszewska, painting by Edvard Munch, 1893. Munch Museet. <<https://www.munch.no/en/edvard-munch/dagny-juel-18671901/>>.

³ There are several testimonies on her from this period, focusing on her erotic attraction and way of acting in the male dominated circle. For a research-based account of her life which also discusses sources and rumors, see Mary Kay Norseng's biography (Norseng 1991).

⁴ The prose poems were indexed under one heading, the title or epigram of the first one, "Singt' mir das Lied vom Leben und vom Tode," but all have their own title. The

Both the drama and prose poems were published in *Samtiden*, founded in 1890, and the most influential modern, cultural, and political Norwegian periodical of its time. Due to her marriage to Stanisław Przybyszewski and their common European network, several of her works were simultaneously translated into Czech and Polish: three of the prose poems were first published in Polish, in 1889, the fourth following in 1900.⁵ Moreover, the drama *Synden* [*The Sin*] was published and recited in Czech in Prague in 1898 and published in Polish the same year, while a third drama, *Når solen går ned* [*As the Sun Sets*], was issued in Polish in 1899. Immediately after her death, a fourth drama, *Ravnegård* [*Raven Farm*], was published in Polish in 1902.⁶

It was not until the 1970s that more texts were published in Norway. Martin Nag, a Slavic literature scholar interested in *fin-de-siècle* culture and the connections between Edward Munch and Stanisław Przybyszewski, published thirteen poems preserved in manuscripts in the possession of Juel's daughter, and two years later he found the manuscript of Juel's short story "Rediviva," dated Berlin, December 1893, among Munch's papers and letters.⁷ The three dramas that had so far only appeared in Czech and Polish were published in Norwegian in 1978 by another scholar of Slavic literature, Ole Michael Selberg. Finally, Dagny Juel's daughter gave the manuscript of a fourteenth poem to the American scholar Mary Kay Norseng when she was writing her biography, and the poem was published in this biography in 1991. A Norwegian edition of Dagny Juel's collected works appeared in 1996 (Juel 1996).⁸

others are: "Oh, la tristesse de tout cela, mon âme!...", "I tusmørket" and "In questa tomba oscura."

⁵ "Singt' mir das Lied vom Leben und vom Tode," "Oh, la tristesse de tout cela, mon âme!...", "In questa tomba oscura," translated by Stanisław Przybyszewski, in *Życie* 2/1899; "O zmierzchu" [I tusmørket], translated by Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Życie* 1/1900, Cracow and Lviv.

⁶ "Hřích" [*Synden*], translated by Hugo Kosterka, *Moderní Revue* IX, Prague, 1899; "Kiedy słońce zachodzi" [Når solen går ned], translated by Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Życie* 17–18/1899; "Grzech" [*Synden*], translated by Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Życie* 21–22/1899; *Kiedy słońce zachodzi* [Når solen går ned and *Synden*], translated by Stanisław Przybyszewski, Warsaw: Fiszer, 1902; *Krucze gniazdo* [*Ravnegård*], translated by Stanisław Przybyszewski, Warsaw: Jan Fiszer, 1902.

⁷ The poems and short story were first published by Martin Nag in *Samtiden* in 1975 and in the newspaper *Dagbladet* in 1977, respectively, then in a booklet (Nag 1987).

⁸ Translations to other languages than Polish and Czech have been published during the last decades. An English translation of her poems appeared in 1998: *The poems of Dagny Juel Przybyszewska*, translated and introduced by Hanne Bramness, Philadelphia, Penn.: Branch Redd Books, 1998. In French, the short story, two poems and one of the prose poems were translated and introduced in 2012 by Ingrid Junillon, in *Le Pan poétique des muses*, no. 2, 2012, at <http://www.pandesmuses.fr/article-n-2-dagny-juel-textes-choisis-110342761.html>. The same year, her short story, prose poems and four dramas were translated to Swedish: *Rediviva*, Ordbrand, *Hesperos* 7, 2012 and her collected work were published in Russian *Manuskript. Tretij* [collected

Until recently, Dagny Juel's work has been read in close relation to her life. And while her collected oeuvre consists of one tiny volume, there have been several volumes dedicated to her life. Her first biography appeared in Polish in 1973 (Kossak 1973) followed by Norseng's book in 1991, and another Polish biography in 2006 (Sawicka 2006).⁹ While the interest in Dagny Juel and reception of her work has long been quite strong in Poland, due to fame of her husband, Stanisław Przybyszewski, it was Norseng's biography, published in Norwegian translation in 1992, that made an impact in Norway. Norseng interprets Dagny Juel's life and work in close connection, in a common search for female subjectivity and identity in *fin-de-siècle* culture. An increased interest in Norway is also due to research and documentation work by the Norwegian Women's Museum in Kongsvinger, located in Dagny Juel's childhood home "*Rolighed*" ("*Serenity*"). Based on more material from the Norwegian Women's Museum, Roar Lishaugen, also a Slavic scholar, published the first Norwegian book length biography in 2002 (Lishaugen 2002). Novels, plays and films about Dagny Juel's life have also been issued in Norway. Most important for the general public was the film *Dagny* from 1977, a Norwegian Polish co-production directed by the Norwegian Haakon Sandøy, based on a script by Polish Aleksander Scibor-Rylski, and with an international cast (Sandøy 1977).¹⁰

Presence of Dagny Juel in Norwegian Culture

As my focus in this article is the presence of Dagny Juel in Norwegian public culture, I have carried out searches in The National Library of Norway. This is a legal deposit library, and since most of the collection of books, periodicals, and newspapers is now digitized, it is possible to search for the presence of topics, words and names in Norwegian public culture over time. N-gram searches are available in both book and newspaper collections up until 2022. The National Library N-gram service functions in the same way as Google N-gram, it charts the frequency of an N-gram within a large corpus of texts, either as absolute or relative frequency. For the visualization of Dagny Juel's presence in Norwegian culture over time, I have chosen relative frequency, i.e., the occurrence of Dagny Juel's name compared to all other words or names that year, with a smoothing algorithm (see Birkenes et al. 2015). I have used the default smoothing of four, i.e., with four years before and after, and divided by nine.

works], translated by Liliya Popova and Ju Ivanichenko, Simferopol, 2012. A German translation of her collected works appeared in 2019: *Flügel in Flammen. Gesammelte Werke*, translated, with postface by Lars Brandt, Bonn: Weidle, 2019.

⁹ Working on her biography, Alexandra Sawicka discovered a so far unknown text by Juel from 1897. This was an essay on Norwegian painter Theodor Kittilsen (Juel 1897).

¹⁰ A documentary film, *Død Madonna* (Dead Madonna), directed by Ingeranna Krohn Nydal, appeared in 2006. A radio drama by Elin Tinholt, *Duchas dans*, was broadcast by NRK in September and October 2002, and published by Solum, Oslo, 2002.

The search result for Dagny Juel in the book corpus (Fig. 3¹¹) indicates a steady presence from her lifetime until the present, with striking peaks related to feminist literary studies and renewed interest in *fin-de-siècle* culture from the 1980s onwards.



Fig. 2. Presence of Dagny Juel in the book corpus of the National Library of Norway's digitized collection. Numbers on the y-axis are parts per million (ppm). Source: N-grams from NBdigital 2022—Språkbanken (CC-ZERO). Author photo.

The search was done with four name variants that have been present at different times. Dagny Przybyszewska was her signature as a writer and translator and appears with her first publications in the 1890s; in Norwegian culture, however, she has from the 1930s onwards most often been referred to as Dagny Juel, with the variants Dagny Juel Przybyszewska and Dagny Juell Przybyszewska (see Fig. 4).

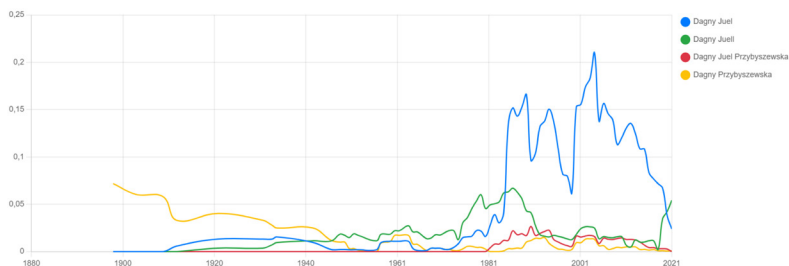


Fig. 4. Presence of Dagny Juel in four different name variants in the book corpus of the National Library of Norway. Source: N-grams from NBdigital 2022—Språkbanken (CC-ZERO). Author photo

Loking up publication details behind the graph, one finds that the slight but steady presence before 1980 is due to her connection to Edvard Munch; she appears in popular and scholarly works on the artist and his milieu. Her name figures both in biographical information about her and as the title of Munch's famous portrait of her from 1893; thus the appearance of her name increases as interest in Munch continues to flourish. The peaks in the late 1980s and early 1990s are related to Nag's booklet, Norseng's biography, works of literary and cultural history as well as literary anthologies that include a poem

¹¹ I want to thank research librarian Lars G. Johnsen at the National Library of Norway for invaluable help in refining the N-gram visualisations.

by Juel. Around 2001-2003, a new peak includes Lishaugen's biography and more studies on Munch and his artistic circle. In the last decades, however, it is astonishing to see how Juel appears in many differing contexts, whether as emblematic of her period or as epitomizing bohemian culture. One such context is a workbook for students of Norwegian as a second language, centered around topics of how to live in Norway. Here, a text on Dagny Juel's life figures under the topic of "love and married life, gender roles," in exercises of verbs and conjunctions to be filled in (Wessel & Sæther, 2014: 33-36).

In the newspaper corpus, the presence of her name makes quite a different curve, with one marked peak in the late 1970s (Fig. 5):



Fig. 5. Presence of Dagny Juel, in combined search with all name variants, in the newspaper corpus of the National Library of Norway's digitized collection. The early appearances of her name, in the 1880s and 1890s, are birthday notifications and concert announcements. Source: N-grams from NBdigital 2022—pråkbanken (CC-ZERO). Author photo.

A first, small rise is related to two articles by literary critic Sonja Hagemann in *Dagbladet* in 1962 and 1963, followed by a longer essay in *Samtiden* in 1965 (Hagemann 1962, Hagemann 1963, Hagemann 1965). The first *Dagbladet* article, an opinion piece, was motivated by an article by the Swedish journalist and critic Nils Beyer in *Bonniers litterära magasin* in December 1962. It told the story of August Strindberg's friendship with the young Swedish botanist Bengt Lidfors in the 1890s, and quoted Strindberg's letters to another friend which presents Dagny Juel as a promiscuous man-eater (Beyer 1962). Hagemann (1962) reacted to old rumors and argued that it was Juel's high cultural standing, and not her sensual charm and love affairs, that made her a central figure among the men. In the *Samtiden* article she further elaborated the point of Juel as an inspiring muse for Munch and other male artists (Hagemann 1965). These articles sparked some debate at the time, and Hagemann gave many lectures that were announced in the papers.

A much clearer peak in 1977 is due to the film *Dagny*, the Norwegian Polish co-production, that premiered in Norway at the end of January (Sandøy 1977). Announcements and promotional interviews were published in both major and local Norwegian newspapers, as the film was shown in cinemas all over the country. The actress Lise Fjeldstad who played the leading part, was interviewed and gave a positive evaluation of Juel and her work: "... everyone has different perceptions of her. But her poems, prose and short plays give one

the impression that she was a thinking and enormously sensitive person.”¹² The film had positive reviews, although with some remarks that the film was more about male bohemian artists than the female title figure, and that it was strange to portray a female writer without at any time presenting her writing (see for instance Holst 1977). As a spinoff of the film, and perhaps because of absence of Juel’s own work in the film, a reading of Juel’s poems by Lise Fjeldstad was also broadcast by the Norwegian broadcasting company (NRK) in a fifteen-minute program on the evening of March 1st. At this time, there was only one radio channel in Norway, and it was still common to listen to the radio, even poetry readings late at night. As a media happening it stands out in the N-gram search, as radio programs were widely announced in the papers, often with short notices.¹³

New peaks in the last forty years represent reviews of Norseng’s biography and other works, a “Dagny Juel week” in Kongsvinger, in 1987, her 150th anniversary in 2017, as well as several events held by the Norwegian Women’s Museum. The graphs thus make it possible to discern some mechanisms underlying the appearance, disappearance, and reappearance of Dagny Juel—as writer and woman—in a diversified Norwegian media culture. The 1977 film presenting Juel in a rather stereotypical way as the bohemian queen, seems crucial in this process. When it comes to Juel’s position in Norwegian academia, the mechanisms are different, and in the following pages, I will study her position in literary history and other scholarly works.

Acceptance and Neglect in Literary History

Literary history was an important academic discipline in Norway in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, since it is a mean to showcase both an independent national literary heritage and its links to European literary trends. Several renowned professors of Norwegian and Scandinavian literature have thus devoted themselves to literary historiography, targeted at both high school and university students and the larger public.¹⁴ Dagny Juel was never

¹² Norwegian original: «... alle har forskjellige oppfatninger av Dagny Juell. Men gjennom det hun selv har skrevet av dikt, prosa og små teaterstykker får man inntrykk av at hun var et tenkende, og enormt følsomt menneske». See for instance in a local paper Ringsaker Blad, March 26th, 1977, p. 5, in an announcement of a coming film club event where the film was to be set up with Sandøy and Fjeldstad present for discussion. Fjeldstad would also read Juels poems.

¹³ This effect is also visible when the film *Dagny* was shown in NRK, in the weekly program of a film on Monday evening, on October 8th, 1984.

¹⁴ The most important historiographical works from the first part of the 20th century are: Just Bing, *Norsk litteraturhistorie*, Kristiania, Gyldendal, 1904; Carl Nærup, *Illustreret Norsk litteraturhistorie: sidste tidsrum 1890-1904*, Kristiania, Det norske actieforlag, 1905; Kristian Elster, *Illustreret norsk litteraturhistorie*, 6 vols, 1923–24;

mentioned in any work of literary history until the mid-1970s. Then, in a large new, multi-authored work,¹⁵ the literary historian Rolf Nyboe Nettum, in a section on “the enigmatic woman,” mentions Juel and her position among the 1890s generation: “She wrote a little, but it was as the muse of geniuses that she played a role” (Nettum 1975: 57)¹⁶. The unusual phrase “muse of geniuses” is a direct quotation of the title of Sonja Hagemann’s article from *Samtiden* ten years earlier and marks the first acceptance of Juel in Norwegian literary history. The inclusion highlights her “erotic charm” but says nothing about the nature of her work. Eight years later, however, in the second edition of *Norges litteratur*, Nettum’s paragraph on Juel has been completely revised. He characterizes her as “an independent personality, intellectually equal to ‘the egoistical genius snobs’ who only saw her as a gendered being”¹⁷ and states that her dramas are of particular interest because of her female voice (Nettum 1983: 57). In his autobiography from 2008, Nettum himself comments upon the change of mind, stating that the 1975 version belonged to a male perspective that came to be “strongly contested by anonymous letter writers” and that he realized that they were right (Nettum 2008: 210).¹⁸ No further comment is made upon the “anonymous letter writers,” but there are reasons to believe they were female, and possibly students, inspired by new feminist movements and research. The publication of Juel’s poetry by Nag in 1975 and the dramas previously unpublished in Norwegian by Selberg in 1978 were obvious prerequisites for admitting her as a writer in official national literary history.

Nettum held on to his positive view on Juel in later writings on Norwegian *fin-de-siècle* literature. In an introductory article to a volume celebrating the centenary of the periodical *Samtiden*, Nettum states that a “distinct female voice” comes through in all four of Juel’s dramas, “where the relationship between man and woman is portrayed in a way both characteristic of the period, and distinctive.” And he concludes that Juel “was indeed much more than an ‘Aspasia,’ a source of inspiration to the male celebrities of the time” (Nettum 1993: 23).¹⁹

Fredrik Paasche, Francis Bull, A.H. Winsnes and Philip Houm, *Norsk litteraturhistorie*, 6 vols, Oslo, Aschehoug, 1924–1955; Eiliv Skard, *Norsk litteratur gjennom 1000 år*, 3 vols, Oslo, Aschehoug, 1948.

¹⁵ Edvard Beyer (ed.) *Norges litteraturhistorie*, 6 vols, Oslo, Cappelen 1974–1975.

¹⁶ Norwegian original: “Hun skrev en del, men det var som geniernes inspiratrise hun spilte en rolle.”

¹⁷ Norwegian original: “Dagny Juel var en uavhengig personlighet, intellektuelt jevnbyrdig med de ‘egoistiske genisnobbene’ som utelukkende så henne som et kjønnsvesen.”

¹⁸ Norwegian original: “Dette mannfolksynet ble sterkt imøtegått av ukjente brevskrivere. Og jeg gav dem rett.”

¹⁹ Norwegian original: “En særpreget kvinnelig røst gjør seg gjeldende i Dagny Juels fire små dramaer [...] der forholdet mellom kvinne og mann både får en tidstypisk og en

Nettum's "anonymous letter writers" were followed by a noteworthy stream of feminist literary studies in Norwegian academia, and when it comes to Juel in particular, works of women's literary history are of great importance because they present readings of Juel's work in the context of other female writers.²⁰ In 1986, Elisabeth Aasen published a volume on Norwegian female writers, subtitled a "supplement to Norwegian literary history," in which there is a short chapter on Juel. Aasen dwells mostly on Juel's dramas and regards her as an exceptional female writer: "The emphasis on the power of passion and the darkness of the soul makes Dagny's drama an expression of a neo-romantic mood that few female writers were caught up in" (Aasen 1986: 145).²¹ Two years later, a three-volume comprehensive literary history of Norwegian women writers appeared, *Norsk kvinnelitteraturhistorie*, in which Juel appears in the first volume's chapters on both drama and poetry (Norseng 1989, Gimnes 1989). The vast interest in rewriting literary history from a feminist perspective also resulted in a *Nordic women's literary history* in five volumes in the 1990s, in which there is a small chapter on Juel (Rønning 1996).²²

However, these are not the final re-inscriptions of Dagny Juel into Norwegian literary history. In a centenary issue of *Samtiden* in 1990, literary historian Per Thomas Andersen gave an overview of the writers included in the periodical issues of the 1890s, and here he commented upon the presence and omission of female authors, stating that Alvilde Prytz, Elisabeth Schøyen, and Dikken Zwilgmeyer were all systematically "forgotten," whereas Amalie Skram was frequently mentioned, and Dagny Juel "was allowed in with a complete little drama" (Andersen 1990: 6). In 2001 he repeats the same rather condescending phrase "was allowed in" ("fikk slippe til") in his own one-volume Norwegian literary history (Andersen 2001: 282). And in a separate paragraph on Juel, he writes about her bohemian life, juicy rumors about her, and her position as muse, concluding that her "literary production is small, but it conforms to the overall tone and trend of the 1890s" (Andersen 2001: 320).²³ This verdict is both misleading and provocative, because it simply fails to notice and recognize a female voice that in many ways stands apart from the texts of male authors in the literature from the 1890s.

særpreget utforming. Dagny Juel var jo noe langt meir enn en 'Aspasia', en inspiratrise for tidens mannlige berømteter."

²⁰ Norseng also published on Dagny Juel's dramas in a Scandinavian context before her biography appeared, see Norseng 1988.

²¹ Norwegian original: "Lidenskapens herredømme og sjelens mørkerom gjør Dagnys dramatik til uttrykk for en ny-romantisk stemning som få kvinnelige forfattere ble fanget inn i."

²² Nordic women's literary History was in 2011 launched as a trilingual online resource <https://nordicwomensliterature.net>

²³ Norwegian original: "Dagny Juel Przybyszewskas litterære produksjon er liten, men den er holdt i 1890-årenes tone og trend."

After the collaborative works in several volumes from the interwar period and the 1970s, Andersen was the only author of this dense one-volume work, and so far, it is the last one in the long series of national literary history in Norway.²⁴ It is an open question whether literary history still matters as an academic genre in Norwegian literary institutions, or whether it has lost its importance. Within the school system, however, manuals with literary history are still used and produced, and it is interesting to find Juel, in one of the most recent ones, among the authors mentioned in a chapter on decadence and early modernism, under the heading “Dagny Juel—female author in a period of antifeminism” (Eide et al. 2015: 124).²⁵

The Inclusion of the Female Voice: Juel in Academic Studies and Literary Anthologies

Apart from literary history, there are several ways to support and make audible the female voices of the past. One strategy is simply to write not only biographical studies, but also close textual analyses; another is to have the works distributed to new readers. Juel scholars have tried both strategies.

All four prose poems appeared in 1992 in a follow-up anthology of the Norwegian women’s literary history (Hareide ed.). “I tussmørket” also appeared ten years after, in an anthology of Norwegian prose poems (Wærp 2002). When it comes to the lyric poems, only three have been anthologized, with two being published in more than one collection.²⁶ The collections are thematically different—love poems, poems for women, and modern poems *vers libres*. Considering the small number of poems in Dagny Juel’s oeuvre, this is still quite impressive, and it is interesting to note that Lise Fjeldstad, who played the part of Dagny in the eponymous film from 1977, included one poem in her collection of love poems.

After her previously unpublished work was brought to light in the 1970s, a slowly growing body of scholarship on Dagny Juel has emerged. Among textual studies are two articles by Norseng in American-Scandinavian contexts, one which reads Juel’s poetry and relates it to the poetry of the much younger Finland Swedish poet Edith Södergran (1892–1923) (Norseng 1993), and

²⁴ Professor Willy Dahl also published a literary history of which he was the sole author, *Norges litteratur. Tid og tekst*, 3 vols, Oslo, Aschehoug, 1981–1989. Dagny Juel is not mentioned at all in this work, even if there is a chapter on the 1890s which problematizes sexual relations in the period.

²⁵ Norwegian original: *Dagny Juel—kvinnelig forfatter i en antifeministisk tid*.

²⁶ “Stille, stille” is the one most often included. It appeared for the first time already in Bugge (ed.) 1987, and again in Fjeldstad (ed.) 1996, Granaas (ed.) 1998, and in Brenner (ed.), 2016. “Naar stormen vælter sig om huset” was published in Heggelund & Vold (eds.), 1995 and in Bull-Gundersen (ed.) 2002: “Jeg har drukket af din dybe brønd,” was published in Vold (ed.) 2013.

another which investigates the motives of love and destruction in Juel's works with a focus on the female heroine (Norseng 1994). Norseng reads the female heroine as a transgressive character who defies obstacles in an impossible search to free herself. Norwegian Slavic scholar Jan Brodal (2011) studies Juel's use of strange and vital flower images and compares them to the fables of Russian V.M. Garshin (1855–1888). Rønning (2002) reads one lyric poem dedicated to Juel's son Zenon as a sinister version of a lullaby and relates it to challenges of modern motherhood, while a later article analyses Juel's prose poems as a search to express female subjectivity within a European aesthetics of decadence (Rønning 2020).

Promising for the future are new master theses devoted to her work. In recent decades, two master's students at the University of Oslo have produced close readings of Juel's texts without relating them so closely to her biography as was done before. Moreover, they investigate the work in the light of different aesthetic concepts and thus demonstrate that Juel's work is still open to new interpretations. Linn Nerli (2011) coins the term "gothic modernism" in order to understand the disrupted language of haunted female figures and their voices, and Hanne Nicolaysen (2018) relates Juel's work to vitalism, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer to elucidate the role of eros and the death drive and the intertwinement of anguish and desire in her work. Their readings also claim that Juel's literary work is of national interest, alongside the well-known male authors of the era.

Visible and Voiceless?

125 years after her death, it is thus possible to conclude that there is a strong interest in Dagny Juel as a writer, and not only as a *femme fatale* and myth. My initial question, based on the media events in 2023, was "Do her dramatic life story and steady media presence overshadow her literary voice and the originality of her work?" As I hope to have shown, it must be answered carefully. At certain moments, the myth of the bohemian woman outshines the writer and her work, and the 2023 podcasts focusing merely on the "Dagny Juel enigma" and her tragic end, certainly represent a step backwards in relation to the scholarly attention to her literary works in the aftermath of the vague of women's literary history. However, her voice as a writer would probably not have been heard at all without her visibility as a cultural figure, since it was her connection to Munch and other male artists that kept her name alive during the first seven decades after her death.

A prerequisite for her inscription to Norwegian literary history was the discovery and publication in the 1970s of her hitherto unpublished texts. Biographies, feminist research, anthologies, and the "anonymous letter writers" that made a literary historian change his mind, further contributed to her inclusion. A decisive moment for Dagny Juel's inclusion in a broader

Norwegian culture, however, seems to be the 1977 film *Dagny*, which aroused an interest that made even her poems audible to a large audience. It may still be that renewed media interest in her life will inspire new listeners and readers to engage with her literary works.

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