

# Anachrony, Disability, and the Gay Man

## Depictions of the Deviant in Two Norwegian Novels

### ABSTRACT

A recent addition to critical theory are works of “crip theory” that seek to analyze the cultural construction of disability. It often draws on insights formulated by queer theory, demonstrated by the very use of the derogatory word *crip*, echoing the subversive use of, for example, *queer*. The intersectional appeal of crip theory is clear in Alison Kafer’s *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013), which also employs the concept of queer temporality. How might crip theory and queer temporality jointly contribute to queer – and queering – readings?

This article offers a comparative reading of two Norwegian novels that have yet to be explored in terms of their adherence to a queer literary tradition. The first, Nini Roll Anker’s *Enken* [*The Widow*] (1932) portrays the homosexual son of the main character as immature and decadent. When his “perversity” is discovered, he falls ill and dies, the mandatory ending of early fictional representations of homosexuality. The second novel, Magnhild Haalke’s *Allis sønn* [*Alli’s Son*] (1935), makes no explicit mention of homosexuality. However, the eponymous son is a problem child assigned the stereotypical characteristics of the homosexual: physically feeble but mentally alert; creative and artistic, but also eerily different in his community of Norwegian fishermen and farmers.

Both works were published in the 1930s, when psychoanalysis emphatically entered Norwegian public debate, and public health became a central topic. Authorities felt and expressed the need to protect society from the spread of homosexuality. Understood as a potentially contagious disease grounded in a developmental error in childhood (cf., Freud 1925), it was a threat to future national well-being. While overlapping with the idea of disability, homosexuality is thus also intimately connected to *time*, a “modern” problem menacing the future.

Hence, this article will attempt to show how the novels in question engage differently with ideas of disability, normative time, and the hopeful futurity associated with the child. In this way, it will also aim to show the utility of crip theory and queer temporality in gay and lesbian literary studies.

**Keywords:** Nini Roll Anker, Magnhild Haalke, crip theory, queer theory, queer temporality, psychoanalysis, social hygiene

**TWO RELATIVELY OBSCURE** novels from the Norwegian 1930s provide interesting documentation of ideas about sexuality, disability, and queer development. Nini Roll Anker's (1873–1942) *Enken* [*The Widow*] (1932) depicts the struggles of the fifty-year-old widow Hanna Mowitz to ensure a prosperous life for her children as they come of age. Set in a contemporary lower middle-class milieu during the depression of the 1930s, the focus of the novel gradually turns toward the youngest son, nineteen-year-old Alv. Hanna grows worried as her son seems to lead a debauched life, and is shocked when he turns out to be a homosexual. Having hurt his mother severely, Alv soon falls terminally ill and dies.

*Enken* will provide an interesting basis for comparison to the novel *Allis sønn* [*Alli's Son*] (1935) by Magnhild Haalke (1885–1984). Alli's son Elling, five years old at the beginning of the novel, is a problem child. Physically feeble, but intellectually precocious, he is an outcast in the rough environment of a northern Norwegian fishing village. The novel features a nuanced and touching portrayal of a mother trying to care for her demanding son in the face of her tyrannical parents-in-law. Tired of his mother's failed attempts to shield him from harm, Elling's final "pek" ["prank"]<sup>1</sup> as a teenager involves him strangling his younger sister to death. In the end Elling is taken away by the District Sheriff.

Lauded by her contemporaries, Haalke has only recently been rediscovered by the reading public.<sup>2</sup> While *Alli's Son* has thus attracted little academic interest until now, the few more extensive analyses that do exist (Lysø 1966; Terjesen 1981; Dahl 1991) employ psychological, sociological, or pedagogical perspectives. Only to a lesser extent has it been studied as a (dialogic) text, a fact this article aims to remedy. Moreover, comparing these novels will highlight a dimension of Norwegian 1930s

literature that has so far been overlooked, namely the relation between the flourishing depictions of childhood in the period<sup>3</sup> and the many simultaneous discussions of homosexuality.

What perception of the male homosexual emerges through Anker's and Haalke's connotations of disability, asynchrony, and deviant sexual development? The first section of the article argues that the potential homosexual content of Haalke's novel becomes more apparent if we contextualize it with Anker's novel, as well as with the literary criticism of the Norwegian 1930s, and with contemporaneous sexological ideas. The next section will focus on *Enken* and its depictions of illness and developmental abnormality. The article will go on to discuss how the theoretical concepts of *queer temporality* and *crip theory* might shed light on aspects of *Alli's Son* that have remained obscure. Insights from crip theory have yet to be applied to Norwegian literary scholarship. Indeed, as Swedish gender scholar Jens Rydström (2016, 50) has underlined, while queer theory has had an immense impact on academia as well as the media since the early 1990s, crip theory has seemingly not succeeded in filling a gap because disability was already on the political agenda. Nevertheless, one important role this theory might play is to reintroduce sexuality and gender into scholarship on disability (Rydström 2016, 52). Hence, this article will argue that crip theory helps us to perceive how the character of Elling alludes to certain ideas of abnormal development and how deviance is constructed in multiple dimensions. As will be shown, crip theory and queer temporality bring out the common traits of the two novels, and help us to understand how they connect ideas of normalcy and deviance to ideas of sexual development. Hence, one aim of this article is to demonstrate the utility of crip theory in literary studies in general, while specifically arguing that it sheds new light on depictions of the child in Norwegian 1930s literature.

### **The Origin of Male Homosexuality**

In order to highlight the textual signs of homosexuality, this first section will provide a contextualization focusing on 1930s literary criticism and Freudian ideas about psychosexual development. With respect

to the reception of Anker's *Enken*, it is particularly interesting to read the radical critic Paul Gjesdahl's (1932) review. Sympathetic to the depiction of Hanna Mowitz, Gjesdahl (1932, 8) assesses the novel through a survey of homosexuality in literature. He laments how the topic has been "draped and dressed up" by the Danish author Herman Bang, and writes admiringly of its open treatment in the work of Walt Whitman. He then identifies an increase in literary depictions of the topic, but is critical of the narrative focalization in recent works:

[T]hey regard the difficult problem from the outside; the homosexualist's relation to society and his (or her) kin – his parents or spouse – concerns the author to a stronger degree than the tragedy of the pervert himself. (Gjesdahl 1932, 8)

Moreover, in Gjesdahl's opinion, the problems depicted in the novel would have been more interesting if Anker had been interested in the *origin* of the "perversity."<sup>4</sup> As will be shown, this origin was to be explained by psychoanalysis.

Indeed, one may identify a tendency among critics of this period to acclaim homosexuality as a literary topic, but only to the extent that its etiology plays a central part. Another example of this is a review of Borghild Krane's novel *Følelsers forvirring* [*Confusion of Emotions*] (1937), praised by the conservative critic Barbra Ring (1937):

Borghild Krane so thoroughly seeks to come to the bottom of, and to uncover, the psychology of such women that one reads with patience and interest about the attraction to their girlfriends, as well as the partial animosity toward the male – who might have saved the lesbian and put her on the right track. (Ring 1937)

On the one hand, there is a growing understanding of homosexuals, and, importantly, *sympathy* for their troubles among Norwegian intellectuals. On the other hand, the etiology is important because knowledge of it facilitates *prevention*.

In asking for, and praising, depictions of etiology, these critics demand that novelists engage with the dominant scientific approach to homosexuality, Freudian psychoanalysis. Freud represents one of the watershed moments of modern sexology (Schaffner 2012, 138). His *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, published in 1905, rejected a theory promoted by previous sexologists and homosexual rights activists alike: that homosexuality was an inherited degenerative condition. Rather, Freud (1924, 106) believed that all children were “polymorphously perverse.” Any male child could be able to develop homosexuality if their sexual instincts went unbridled and if they failed to go through the Oedipus complex in the right manner. The male homosexual, then, is imagined as someone who has remained at, or regressed to, an infantile stage (Freud 1924, 46). Furthermore, Freud postulated that the male homosexual child, through a particularly intense relationship with his mother, could be “seduced.” The boy would thus reach a premature sexual awareness, identify with his mother, and therefore narcissistically choose partners similar to himself (Freud 1925, 413). Note the importance accorded to childhood and the mother, as well as the idea of the homosexual as someone temporally and developmentally out of line. Freud might be said to have “crippled” the homosexual.

Psychoanalysis held an enormously important place in the Norwegian public mind of the inter-war years. Freudianism was a general phenomenon of the epoch, whose teachings various writers employed whenever they saw fit (Thon 2016, 234). It is only to be expected that Freudian ideas would surface in the first scientific article on homosexuality written for the Norwegian public, published in 1932 in the journal *Populært tidskrift for seksuell opplysning* [*Popular Journal for Sexual Education*]. Here, the socialist physicians Torgeir Kasa and Karl Evang (1947, 192) argued against legal punishments for homosexuality based on their view that it was often a developmental disorder. While Freudianism in Norwegian literature has been thoroughly analyzed,<sup>5</sup> it is striking that Freud’s influence on homosexuality as a literary topic has barely been studied. In general, homosexuality in Norwegian inter-war literature is rather underexplored. Elsewhere in Scandinavia, the situation is different:

for example, lesbian themes in the Swedish inter-war years have been thoroughly studied by Liv Saga Bergdahl (2010), Jenny Björklund (2014), and Eva Borgström (2016), among others. The importance of psychoanalysis and sexology is underlined in all of these works. Tellingly, however, research on male homosexual themes is scarcer; there seems to be less interest in how men culturally perform gender and sexuality.<sup>6</sup>

Freudian psychoanalysis, then, was a central element of both specialized and popular medical writings in this era, but also of literary and social debates. This is evident in Gjesdahl's (1932) review of *Enken*:

[I]t has lately become clear that [homosexuality] is often a mental illness related to common neuroses, and that it disappears when the unfortunate cause is uncovered. Strikingly often, this cause is to be found in a much too great, jealous tenderness from one of the parents, for example in the care shown by a strong and imperious mother for her weak son, for whom no woman is good enough. The perversity of the son is in this case an unconscious sacrifice to his mother, an escape into a neurosis, which prevents the marriage she despises. (Gjesdahl 1932, 8)

Thus, Gjesdahl exemplifies the circulation and adaptation of psychoanalytic ideas amongst the literary public. Moreover, the desire to “cure” homosexuality should also be considered in the context of popular ideas about social and racial hygiene. Sociologist Rune Slagstad (2015, 195) has remarked how a “positivist-technocratic social science” gained ground in the 1930s. Right- and left-wingers alike promoted sterilization of those whose hereditary material was deemed inferior (Slagstad 2015, 200–3). The perceived need to strengthen the population and counter the dreaded genetic degeneration was an important reason why the Scandinavian welfare states developed in this period (Melby 2002, 114–5; Schiøtz and Skaset 2003, 19).

Social hygiene and psychoanalysis thus set the tone for the literary treatment of homosexuality. In *Enken*, Anker follows a gay and lesbian literary tradition, which often includes a representative of the medical profession in the literary text (cf., Heede 2017, 53); one of the widow's

other sons is a doctor. This underlines the impression that homosexuality seems to have been an acceptable topic provided that the literary text offered some kind of (authoritative) explanation. It is all the more interesting to note that Gjesdahl was dissatisfied with *Enken*, as this article will go on to argue that Anker's affinity to Freudianism is striking in a crip theoretical perspective.

While Anker thus seems to endorse various sexological ideas about the homosexual, Haalke, on the other hand, gives a far more ambiguous portrayal of the "deviant" Elling. Indeed, she professed not to have read "one line" of Freud's work before writing *Alli's Son* (Lysø 1992, 186). However, psychoanalysis, as well as the other cultural signs of homosexuality were so well established in the Norwegian public debate of the inter-war years that direct references such as Anker's doctor seem unnecessary to ask for. A teacher and avid reader, Haalke would have been well acquainted with the cultural signs of homosexuality. Indeed, the critic Kristian Elster (1935) emphasized that *Alli's Son* was "marked by the psychological knowledge of our times." Haalke's debut was also praised overseas. In the *New York Times Book Review*, Alma Luise Olson (1936) characterized Elling as "a young boy endowed with the sort of precocity that suggests genius, though it soon develops into contrarious willfulness, then *perversity*, then insanity" (my italics). One should note how Olson conflates several mental qualities, thus giving a concise presentation of a conceptual node symptomatic of contemporary definitions of homosexuality. The mention of "perversity" in 1935 would likely conjure up the idea of the *foremost* of all dreaded perversions. Homosexuality was also considered a mental illness, associated with extraordinary cognitive and creative skills – in other words, even terms like "genius" and "insanity" could function as allusions to homosexuality.<sup>7</sup> In addition, it was understood as a form of *anachrony*: the male homosexual, having failed to go through a normative psychosexual development, destabilized the line between childhood and adulthood.

In a psychological and Marxist-feminist reading of *Alli's Son*, Jeanne Terjesen (1981, 70–1) refers to a study of Norwegian children of sail-

ors and stay-at-home mothers, indicating that these children are simultaneously infantilized and forced to be mature. As will be shown below, Elling, whose sailor father is absent for most of the time, is constantly protected by his mother, but is also presented as mature beyond his years. While this aspect has previously been commented on, the possibility that this characterization symbolizes homosexuality has so far not been mentioned. Instead of psychoanalyzing the characters, this article will go on to read the novels contextually, focusing on how Anker and Haalke enter a dialog with contemporaneous ideas of “perversion” in different ways.

### **The Homosexual As a Medical Problem**

To the reader of *Enken*, it can hardly come as a surprise that the youngest son is a homosexual. Small signs of Alv’s “deviance” are scattered throughout the novel. His delicate, effeminate physiognomy, for example: “So slim, so blond, so pure in his facial features. – Could anyone have anything against *him*?” his mother wonders (Anker 1932, 16).<sup>8</sup> Another important sign is his direct characterization as a creative, literary man: “[H]e writes so easily – he has imagination too, and a good temper,” Hanna tells her close friend and confidante Karen (181). The son of a widowed mother, Alv is associated with two father figures. In one of Hanna’s flashbacks, his biological father Knut Mowitz is depicted as a decadent, urban intellectual:

Tired and over-read after his doctoral degree, he came; already he had begun to lose his fair hair, and his hairline had crept high up on his crown. But the skiing and forest air, the freshly strained milk, and old Kari’s food gave him his muscles and color back. (Anker 1932, 35)

In keeping with late 19<sup>th</sup> century degeneration theory, the cerebral city-dweller suffers from his lack of contact with nature.<sup>9</sup> If Alv’s father is a weak dandy, it makes sense that his son represents the last stage of the degenerate process and ends up a “pervert.”

Importantly, the second father figure is the man who, according to Hanna’s knowledge of seduction theories, is responsible for leading her



son to disaster. One would expect joy on Hanna's part when Alv tells her that he has finally gotten a job. However, she is rather skeptical about his new boss, the antique dealer Schnerk, a "snurrig" ["queer"] man of German origin (69–70). A foreigner dealing in porcelain and rare furniture, Schnerk also connotes the decadent and effeminate indoors and the sexual liberalism of the Weimar republic, as opposed to a healthy, Norwegian vitality.<sup>10</sup> In addition, his ethnicity alludes to the homosexual's lack of belonging to the nation and simultaneously to the widespread belief in the transnational community of homosexuals (cf., Murat 2006, 298).<sup>11</sup> Schnerk represents a contrast to the Norwegian admiration for the "natural," and may be regarded as a parallel to Alv's late father. Hence, the lack of a healthy father figure is what leads Alv to his "perversion" and death.

The homosexual signs are thematized by Alv's doctor brother, Karl-Vilhelm. As Hanna turns to him for advice, he pronounces the "diagnosis": "What is it, Karl-Vilhelm – what *is* it?" ... 'Homosexuality, mother.'" (Anker 1932, 187) He proceeds to list the "symptoms":

When we think of it, mother: crying and wailing – female whims,  
when he was a little boy. Dressing up in Line's clothes, wanting to be a  
girl, don't you remember? Cuddly all the time – boys are not like that.  
Afraid of pain – crying from a mere splinter in his finger. Fighting like  
a girl – biting, don't you remember? Smart clothes and gaudy ties – they  
have been of the utmost importance to him ever since his confirmation.  
Pathological, all of it. (189)

This is a metaliterary passage, where the reader's reconstruction of homosexual signs after the pronouncement of the "diagnosis" is reflected in Karl-Vilhelm's retrospective catalog of homosexual markers in his brother's life. The expectation that novels portray the etiology of homosexuality thus influences even the narrative composition of *Enken*. The mapping of childhood psychosexual development is reduced to an external analepsis of one paragraph, reproducing ideas from late 19<sup>th</sup> century sexology of the homosexual as "inverted," but also alluding to Freudian ideas of maternal attachment. Hanna has already discovered her son's

sexuality after he gives a party for his coworkers at their apartment. However, her reaction is delayed to the point where Karl-Vilhelm pronounces the clinical term. The result is a peculiar twisted birth: “[A] pain radiated from her back, like labor pains it made all her muscles tense.” (187) The ordeal concludes with her vomiting, a symbolic depiction of the mother’s abjection of her son. One should understand Gjesdahl’s criticism in this light; although the novel features a representative of the medical profession, there are few obvious references to state-of-the-art psychoanalytical theory. The one crucial exception is the depiction of Alv in line with Freud’s theory of psychosexual developmental disorder.

In the wake of the diagnosis, Alv catches a cold, which evolves into pneumonia, leading to his death. In this way, his invisible “perversion” is first made visible through the lens of pathology, before being delegated to a tangible, corporeal illness. His resulting death serves a triple, purifying function. Firstly, it clears Alv himself of his perversion. He is liberated from a life the novel depicts as weak and abnormal, and is instead ennobled by the martyrdom of a terminal illness.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, Alv’s death also removes his family from any association with a homosexual member. Although this is never stated explicitly, the novel speaks to the fear of the disgrace a “pervert” might bring upon the family. Thirdly, the death of the homosexual character should be considered also in a societal perspective as part of the great hygienic fantasy of Western modernity: that of “a world without homosexuals” (cf., Heede 2004, 108). Social hygiene can be considered a movement which defines certain ways of life as more *worthy* of life, a current of thought that, to a great degree, intersects with the anti-decadent vitalism alluded to in the description of Alv’s father.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, Anker herself underlined the vital part played by homosexuality in the novel. In a letter to her friend, the prolific conservative critic Eugenia Kielland, she wrote:

I could have made Alv a kleptomaniac, for example. But it did not lead anywhere – there is no [other] vice [than homosexuality] which attacks vitality to that degree – which attacks the core of life itself. (Quoted in Ørjasæter and Ørjasæter 2000, 290)

Her biographers Jo and Tordis Ørjasæter (2000, 288) also note that the book is marked by the economic crisis of the 1930s – it is “overloaded with reflections and reasoning.” In other words, homosexuality is a fulcrum for larger societal issues. What the Ørjasæters, like Gjesdahl, do not note, however, is how the character of Alv embodies both psychoanalytic and sexological ideas. As noted by Björklund (2014, 18), the 1930s are marked by a paradigm shift in the understanding of sexuality, as both sexology and psychoanalysis became important frames of reference in this period. As the readings in this article indicate, this claim likely also holds for Norway.

Crucially, explicit reference to the concept of social hygiene in the novel is delegated vertically to Alv’s father. As Hanna dozes off by Alv’s death bed, she remembers the following quote from her late husband: “The cripple, those unfit for life, the superfluous, the burden where there are enough burdens already – teach them that there is a free exit.” (Anker 1932, 240) By the fact of his death, the absent father carries an authority that is forever transmitted and cited by the other members of the family, freeing Hanna from the need to voice the wish for her son’s death. In this way, Alv’s deceased father – significantly, a professor of medicine – exposes the conflation of homosexuality and disability, supported by 19<sup>th</sup> century sexology and Freudianism alike.

This conflation might be understood through what crip theorist Alison Kafer (2013, 6) terms “a political/relational model of disability.” This model locates the problems of disability in, for instance, “discriminatory attitudes, and ideological systems that attribute normalcy and deviance to particular minds and bodies.” At the same time, the political/relational model will also be interested in how, why, and to what extent society chooses to treat and care for individuals with disabilities. In *Enken*, the words quoted by Hanna are symptomatic of a society in which homosexuality is *defined as* disability. The Freudian theory of arrested development is thus alluded to, although not mentioned explicitly by Alv’s brother. The conclusion is logical: Treatment seems futile, and therefore social hygiene measures should do away with it. At the character level, the novel questions the easy eugenic solution – Hanna does not com-

pletely agree with her husband's ideals – but at the plot level, it effectively washes the gay away by means of Alv's pneumonia. *Enken* might thus be said to defend a social hygienic view of who is allowed a role in society.

### Living Anachronies

Disability provides the point of convergence between Anker's and Haalke's novels. In Kafer's (2013, 35) account, disability is closely tied to normative notions of temporality: "[T]ime is foundational in the production of normalcy, such that engaging in particular behaviors at particular moments has become reified as the natural, common-sense course of human development." A heteronormative life follows a certain normative progression: a childhood followed by puberty, finding an opposite-sex partner, and then procreating. Queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman (2010, 3) has coined the term "chrononormativity" for the social structures encouraging this progression, meaning "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity." Psychological models of childhood, such as Freud's, explicitly map out this normativity, as we have seen. In *Enken*, the lack of productivity is precisely Alv's problem. He will never reproduce, nor is his job as a hedonistic antique vendor perceived as useful. As Freeman (2010) notes:

Sexual dissidents became figures for and bearers of new corporeal sensations, including those of a certain counterpoint between now and then, and of occasional disruptions to the sped-up and hyperregulated time of industry. (Freeman 2010, 7)

Alv's profession as an antique vendor might be viewed as symbolic of a fetishizing of the past, violating the expectation that a job be oriented toward the future.

A disrupted temporality is crucial to the depiction of Alv. He is described as light-hearted, oblivious of the responsibilities of adulthood, and Hanna addresses him as "my little boy" (Anker 1932, 16).<sup>14</sup> As J. Halberstam (2005, 174) has pointed out, queer ways of life often invalidate the sharp dichotomy between childhood and adulthood. We

might therefore see his childishness as yet another homosexual marker, an expression of the inability to follow a normal temporal progression. This *inability* in effect turns into a fatal *disability*. The homosexual is imagined as a living anachrony.

This is precisely the point where *Enken* and *Alli's Son* overlap. Haalke's depiction of the precocious and perverted Elling is a study of a child breaking with every normative conception of temporality and masculine development. Hence, Elling is "disabled" in the eyes of his local community of fishermen. A five-year-old at the start of the novel, Elling constantly unsettles his mother by his unchecked imagination and enigmatic comments. His anachrony seems to be the opposite of Alv's; instead of being *younger* than his years, he speaks and acts in a manner that uncannily mimics an adult, for example addressing his mother by her first name. Still, he is unable to care for himself and disregards Alli's instructions:

This was a struggle she had to go through. It concerned his life. She had to protect his life. Her will to do so was strangely tough. It was what mattered every single day. If she did not go about looking out for him, he meddled with everything that was dangerous. Talking to him was of no avail. (Haalke 1935, 7)

Elling is therefore the bearer of a curiously double temporality. He frightens his father Estil, a seaman who only rarely and briefly visits his family. As Estil prepares to go to bed with Alli, Elling tells him to go away: "It was as if a grown-up man was already lying here in bed." (65) Elling is *too old*, but also *too young*, as attested by his inability to learn the skills which would make him a normative young man. Elling thus embodies an anachrony – he is out of sync with himself. From the viewpoint of the adults, a boy approaching school age should be able to row a boat and lay out fish to dry, which he never does. Consequently, his anachrony could also be described as *asynchrony* – temporally, he is "out of joint" (cf., Freeman 2010, 19). This asynchrony is closely connected to his inability to carry out the tasks of a young man, and hence to satisfy

gender norms. This inability is a result of him growing up surrounded by women: his mother and grandmother. He mimics their behavior, curtsying when he should be bowing, for which his mother corrects him: “You are supposed to bow. That’s what boys do.” (Haalke 1935, 28) Thus, Elling’s deviance is triple: with respect to time, skills, and gender roles.

The fact that Elling’s personality is viewed as deviant should be seen in light of the expectation that a chrononormative development leads to productive labor. Alli chastises Elling for being “useless, troublesome, and with no desire to do anything” (195). Throughout the novel, Elling is contrasted with his friend of the same age, Jakop, who does go through a normative development. Furthermore, Elling’s inability is connected to his aestheticism. For example, instead of eating, he sits staring at the table, admiring the beauty of the food (12–3). As in *Enken*, the creative and aesthetic intellect that fails to make a contribution to productive labor may be read as a sign of homosexuality.

At times, Elling’s actions represent an active protest against the productive work of his community. That Elling’s misfortune is due to his rural surroundings was noted by several critics. For example, in the radical newspaper *Dagbladet*, Einar Skavlan (1935) wrote:

A lot of what Elling says and does would fill a mother in the upper class of Oslo with pride in her son. [...] It is one of the most remarkable depictions we have of a child’s mind; it shows how something peculiar and valuable is wasted, only due to a lack of understanding [...]. (Skavlan 1935)

Importantly, knowledge, curiosity, and creativity are dangerous qualities in Elling’s environment. This is a society that rewards those who stay in their place. Indeed, the only one who tries to understand and stimulate Elling is his schoolteacher – also a lonely intellectual (Haalke 1935, 90).<sup>15</sup> Unsurprisingly, the boy does well in Norwegian, learning poetry by heart, producing poetry himself, and inventing words (111). Outside the sphere of urban knowledge, however, his creativity has no value. Home on the island of Bekkerøia, the local fishermen constantly

refer to him by the words “tulling” [“fool”] and “misminning” [“freak”]. From the perspective of a political/relational model of disability, there is a clear sociocultural split in how Elling is perceived. Similarly to how Alv’s family in *Enken* is purged of his presence when Alv dies, everyone in Elling’s family, except for his mother, disavows him. The homosexual is a dangerous intruder in the biological family unit, underlined by how Elling is only perceived to be a valuable human being in an educational context.

This split in *perception* is underlined by the narrative *space*. Before the 1930s, the Norwegian countryside only offered schooling in periods of three months at a time. In *Allis sønn*, children scattered in different villages are expected to gather at the nearest larger settlement and lodge at the school. Afraid to let her son take room and board away from home, Alli instead rows him to school every day. In bad weather, however, Elling is forced to stay at home, missing out on all intellectual stimuli. After a while, Alli is visited by the District Sheriff and threatened with a fine should she fail to send her son to school. Elling is mesmerized by the Sheriff’s eloquence, and fantasizes about staying with him in the larger village of Innlandet (180). As Anne Mari Dahl (1991, 51) notes, the Sheriff symbolizes freedom and openness. He encourages the creativity and verbal artistry of Elling without the judgment and fear voiced by the other adults. The removal from school is thus part of Elling’s motivation for the murder of Tone, his sister, which in effect makes the Sheriff take him away.

As the preceding analysis will have made clear, there are many thematic overlaps between *Enken* and *Alli’s Son*: the absent father, the deviant child, the struggling mother. Perhaps their most striking point of convergence, though, is their depiction of the deviant as a cerebral and aesthetic decadent.<sup>16</sup> Here, it is worth remembering Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (2008, 128) point that across epochs and ideologies, homosexuality seems to be associated with the idea of decadence. As noted, Anker’s novel treats a similar period of crisis – the economic troubles of the 1930s – where the removal of the decadent homosexual restores harmony within the family.

In both novels, the lack of productivity on the part of the children seems crucial. Notwithstanding this similarity, *Alli's Son* is formally very different from *Enken*, as it places a much greater emphasis on the child as focalizer. Much of the narration presents a worldview filtered through Elling's eyes. This is what gives the novel its quality of psychological exploration. Its changes in diction between Elling's fantastic world and the down-to-earthness of his mother are striking. In one scene, the child's fascination with the yellow ashes from their stove leaves Alli worried:

– The wind spreads them, Alli, over the sea, they're scattered and scattered, Alli, and the seagull and the eider-ducks get them in their feathers – and then they shake themselves and get angry – his eyes were glowing with ardor. Alli looked at him with puzzlement. – How did he think of these things? She could not make up anything like that. It never entered her mind. – Elling was strange. At times, he left her silent. It annoyed her. It could not be right for child of his age to think of all these strange things. It exhausted her. (Haalke 1935, 11)

Alli is constantly frightened by Elling's mature language, and the novel masterfully stages a confrontation between their worldviews by alternating the narrative focalization between them and the other characters. Not unlike *Enken*, *Alli's Son* draws on Freudian thinking as an explanation for Elling's "perversity." Freudian psychoanalysis serves a double function in the reading of *Alli's Son*. Firstly, the novel employs an obviously Oedipal plot structure. Elling shies away from his father and has an extremely close attachment to his mother. His baby sister Tone is the result of the visit from his absent father, the only visit at the narrative level. Elling murdering his sister is thus not just an aesthetic act intended to set him free from the suffocating and violent maternal love. It is also a way of avenging himself on his father by proxy, of destroying all paternal presence in the family.

Secondly, psychoanalysis provides certain cultural signs of homosexuality. Like *Enken*, *Alli's Son* is also distinguished by the absence



of a father figure and the compensatory presence of strong women. In *Alli's Son*, Alli's conflict is not only with Elling, but with her tyrannical mother-in-law, who also terrorizes her son, Elling's father. Both novels might then be read through the lens of the psychoanalytic belief in a dominant mother as one cause of homosexuality. In that case, a plausible interpretation would be that Haalke here symbolically depicts an Oedipus complex gone wrong, which in the 1930s would be synonymous with perversion, as we saw in Gjesdahl's assessment of *Enken*. Thus, Haalke manages to provide a fuller account of the mind of the child, and the psychological development of Elling. By doing so she maps out, more clearly and convincingly than Anker, a process of psychosexual development, even though explicit references to psychoanalysis or medicine are absent.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The inability of Anker's Alv and Haalke's Elling to follow a normative development provides an image of time that has become "out of joint." As Kafer (2013) shows, the disabled person is often regarded as someone whose mind and body are misaligned:

In this desire for mind and body to align, what we see is a temporal framing of disability dovetailing with a developmental model of childhood. [...] The linkage of intellectual disabilities with childhood has a long history. [...] [P]eople classified as "idiots" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were seen as "remain[ing] at an early stage of development." (Kafer 2013, 53–4)

This article has aimed to explore how ideas of femininity, disability, and asynchrony all play a role in the cultural image of the male homosexual. These ideas stand in a queer relationship to a hygienic norm of what is desirable for society. While Anker seems to embrace this norm, *Alli's Son* can be read as a defense of the individual value of the socially "disabled" child, and the need for special treatment to ensure that their abilities may thrive.

Through the lens of crip theory and queer temporality, the thematic overlaps between *Enken* and *Alli's Son* become clearer. One might thus reevaluate Gjesdahl's (1932) complaint that Anker fails to account for the etiology of the perverse son. In fact, the device of letting a doctor pronounce a diagnosis, complete with a case history, does provide such an etiology. While the depiction of Alv is firmly embedded in late 19<sup>th</sup> century ideas of the decadent and effeminate homosexual man, his asynchrony also shows an affinity with Freudian developmental doctrine. One should also remember that degeneration theory is a form of asynchrony, since it claims to identify a backward development. Degeneration theory and Freudianism both interpret the homosexual as someone who deviates temporally and developmentally. The above readings indicate how this mode of understanding is symptomatic of the modern idea of the homosexual man. They further demonstrate how crip theory is useful in highlighting queer content, and how a constructive dialog between crip theory and queer temporality offers a new perspective on Freudianism and its influence on imaginative literature, underlining its conflation of anachrony, inversion, and disability.

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## NOTES

1. All translations from the Norwegian are mine. There is also a published English translation of *Allis sønn*, titled *Alli's Son* (Haalke 1937).

2. Her vast authorship was rediscovered by the influential critic Bernhard Ellefsen (2015) in the weekly newspaper *Morgenbladet*. Referring to Ellefsen's article, the journalist Terje Eidsvåg (2017) in *Adresseavisen*, the local newspaper of Haalke's home region, compared her novel to another recent rediscovery, John Williams' *Stoner*.
3. As remarked by e.g., Lysø (1992) and Ellefsen (2015), many of the most prominent authors of 20<sup>th</sup> century Norwegian literature released "childhood novels" in the 1930s, including Sigrid Undset, Sigurd Hoel, Tarjei Vesaas, and Aksel Sandemose.
4. Another important critic, the literary historian Kristian Elster (1932), felt that "the problem of Alv the homosexual takes up too much space; in order to fulfill the idea of the book, he could have suffered from any weakness or vice." In his review one may also sense a wish that homosexuality not be given too much attention. The fear of "contagion" was influential at the time, as attested by the so-called "skitten strøm"-debatten ["dirty stream"] debate, initiated by writer Fredrik Ramm in 1931. Ramm and like-minded critics argued that authors should instruct the people in healthy values and vehemently opposed the presence of open eroticism in contemporary novels (Gentikow 1974, 97–8).
5. See for example Bjørn Olsen Borgen's (2000, 57) analysis of one of the "dirty stream" authors, Rolf Stenersen, where he notes Stenersen's affiliation with the surrealist appraisal of Freud.
6. One notable exception worth mentioning would be Dag Heede's (2003; 2004) studies of Danish authors such as Herman Bang. However, Heede's work does not constitute an attempt to produce a book-length historiographical narrative of homosexuality in Danish literature and culture. The history of male homosexuality – indeed, one might argue of homosexuality in general – in Danish and Norwegian literature remains to be written.
7. As Anna Katharina Schaffner (2012, 94) notes: "The common trope of the sophisticated and aesthetically talented homosexual man likely stems from Havelock Ellis' influential *Sexual Inversion* [1897], which professed that 66 percent of homosexuals 'possess artistic aptitude in varying degree.'" Kasa and Evang (1947, 181) voiced their skepticism about the alleged artistic ability of the homosexual, an indication of the prevalence of this trope at the time.
8. Of course, his very name, meaning "elf," connotes something fairy-like [!] and effeminate.
9. The extremely influential Austro-German sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing was among those who argued that homosexuality was a result of degeneration (Schaffner 2012, 47).
10. Moreover, his name is almost homophonous with "snerk," the Norwegian term for the skin that forms on the surface of hot soups or boiled milk, signaling that he will be a disturbing and uncomfortable presence in the lives of the Mowitz family.

11. After the revelation of Alv's homosexuality, the idea of the homosexual transnational is explicitly transferred to him. Karl-Vilhelm urges Hanna: "Let him leave the country, mother, make him. It would be best for all of us." (Anker 1932, 192) Later, Alv's struggle with death is metaphorically understood by Hanna as a fight between "you and your people, or me and mine" (285) – the homosexual *ethnos* is thus understood as *the people of death*. As so often in early 20<sup>th</sup> century fiction, the only possibilities for the homosexual are those of exile or death.
12. The concept of nature is essential in this respect: he admits to having contemplated suicide (233), but in the end, Hanna is relieved by the thought that her youngest son died "*a natural death*" (295). By implication, a homosexual suicide would have been "unnatural" and shameful.
13. A thorough study of these intersections is provided by Swedish historian of ideas Karin Johannisson (1991).
14. Even Alv's illness is infantilizing. Whenever one of her children falls ill, Hanna is worried that something might happen to them, but she is also happy that they are still dependent on her (Wahlgren 1975, 114). Alv's pneumonia thus makes up for the inverted birth and restores a sort of harmony between him and Hanna.
15. Haalke had worked half her life as an elementary school teacher when she published *Alli's Son*. The portrayal of the teacher might thus be interpreted as a reminder of the importance of skilled teachers in encouraging the abilities of an exceptional child.
16. Norwegian literary scholar Per Thomas Andersen (1992, 563) notes the association of decadence and cerebrality. However, he does not comment upon the gendered aspects of this at all.

## SAMANFATNING

Eit nyleg tilskot til kritisk teori er arbeid innanfor "crip theory" som har til føremål å analysere den kulturelle konstruksjonen av funksjonshemmingar. Denne teori-retninga dreg ofte vekslar på innsikter formulert av queer theory, noko som blir tydeleg i bruken av det nedsetjande ordet *crip* ["krøpling"], tilsvarande den subversive bruken av f.eks. *queer*. Den interseksjonelle appellen til crip theory er tydeleg i Alison Kafers *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013), som òg nyttar konseptet queer temporalitet. Korleis kan crip theory og queer temporalitet saman bidra til queere – og "queerande" – lesingar?

Denne artikkelen presenterer ei samanliknande lesing av to norske romanar som enno ikkje har vorte utforska i ljøs av korleis dei knyter seg til ein queer, litterær tradisjon. Den fyrste er Nini Roll Ankers *Enken* (1932), der den homoseksuelle sonen til hovudpersonen blir framstilt som umogen og dekadent. Idet "perver-

siteten” hans blir oppdaga, blir han sjuk og døyr, i det som er den obligatoriske enden for tidlege, litterære skildringar av homoseksualitet. Den andre romanen, Magnhild Haalkes *Allis sønn* (1935), nemner ikkje homoseksualitet eksplisitt. Like fullt er sonen i tittelen eit problembarn som blir tillagt dei stereotype eigenskapane åt ein homoseksuell mann: fysisk veik, men mentalt sterk; kreativ og kunstnarleg, men også skræmmande annleis i eit norsk fiskar- og jordbrukarsamfunn.

Båe verka vart utgjevne i 1930-åra, då psykoanalysen gjorde sitt inntog i norsk offentleg debatt, og folkehelse vart eit sentralt tema. Styremaktene kjente på, og uttrykte, behovet for å verne samfunnet mot at homoseksualiteten skulle spreie seg. Homoseksualitet vart forstått som ein potensielt smittsam sjukdom med bakgrunn i ein utviklingsfeil i barndomen, og dimed eit trugsmål mot nasjonens framtidige velferd. Samstundes med at han fell saman med idéar om funksjonshemming, er homoseksualiteten såleis også tett knytt til *tid*; han er eit ”moderne” problem som trugar framtida. Difor vil denne artikkelen freiste å vise korleis dei to romanane på ulikt vis går i dialog med idéar om funksjonshemming, normativ tid og den håpefulle framtida assosiert med barnet. På det viset vil artikkelen òg ha til føremål å vise nytten av *crip theory* og *queer temporalitet* i studiar av homofile og lesbiske i litteraturen.