

describe and view puberty as the period when sexuality is discovered. But it is remarkable that the experience should to such an extent involve fears and concerns of how one will fare as a boy in relation to the prevalent "norms": not to become too tall, to become plump and not too skinny,

not to get hair on the chest, or elsewhere for that matter, to have a small enough penis, to worry how one is going to look wearing the mandatory "peho" (short for penis holder and the counterpart to bras in our society) which is to protrude from the skirts boys must wear, etc.

Language is intimately linked with thought and is a subliminal force of incredible power, evidenced by the very resistance linguistic sex neutralizing efforts still evoke today. *Egalia's Daughters* will most likely remain a milepost in the liberation of our language.

## ALVA, ETT KVINNOLIV

Sissela Bok. Stockholm: Bonnier, 1987.

### *Kerstin Camenietzki*

*Alva, ett Kvinnoliv* is a biography of Alva Myrdal, Swedish educator and writer, who was born in 1902 and died a few years ago. She was married to Gunnar Myrdal, the well-known Swedish economist and politician, who was the author of many books, among them *An American Dilemma*, published in 1944.

Alva's life was seemingly successful. She earned her B.A. in Sweden at the University of Stockholm in 1924. This was quite an achievement then, since girls were often not admitted into regular public high-schools, but had to study privately with tutors. From 1936 to 1948, Alva was the founder and director of an institute in Stockholm focusing on educational and child psychology. This institute trained young women to become kindergarten teachers.

Throughout her life, Alva was actively involved in political debates in Sweden, always advocating issues from a radical point of view. She was particularly interested in child education, families and

housing policy. She emphasized freedom and equality — equality between children and adults, men and women, rich and poor and peoples from all religions, countries and cultures.

From the end of World War II, Alva was often called on by the United Nations for various assignments in New York, Paris and Geneva. She also served as the Swedish ambassador to India from 1955 to 1959.

The author, Sissela Bok, is the daughter of Alva and Gunnar, and a Professor of Philosophy at Brandeis University. The book is therefore much more than a biography of Alva Myrdal. The author is, rightfully, proud of her mother's achievements, but she also brings out the "life of a woman" as the subtitle reads. Alva struggled most of her life with the conflict between marriage, family life and a career, or even just being able to work. She found her working life interrupted by having to accompany her husband on his many trips, particularly to the US. At times she felt as a mere appendage to her husband's career. Alva felt it a duty to work, once having received a higher education. Family life became increasingly difficult. Alva's problem was not just a social, but also a psychological one. Her husband had a strong, even domineering personality and Alva seemed to have lost her own identity when she met him. She even burned her diaries to start a new,

better life with him. This was, as her daughter explains, too great a sacrifice for Alva. As conflicts grew between father and son, Alva seemed to stay back, avoiding the conflict. Sissela Bok is very open about her parents' difficulties without being emotional. Instead, the book ends on a very positive note and reveals a strong friendship between mother and daughter later in their lives, after the difficult years in the Myrdal family.

Alva Myrdal wrote several books, many of these while accompanying her husband abroad. She wrote *Nation and Family* in 1941. A new edition was published in 1968 (with an introduction by Patrick Moynihan of Harvard). In 1956 she published *Women's Two Roles* together with Viola Klein, but she had some difficulty finishing this book. She had become involved with women in developing countries and found that the book was relevant only to women in more privileged and affluent societies.

Alva was not a fact-finding researcher, but a writer and reformer who tried to influence public opinion and governments, both in Sweden and throughout the world. Her interests reflected the social issues prevalent during many decades of this century. She became increasingly involved in international issues, such as women's rights across the world, disarmament and the problems of developing countries.

## EARLY SPRING

Tove Ditlevsen. Translated with an Introduction by Tiina Nunnally. Seattle, Washington: The Seal Press, 1985.

### *Ellen Christensen Edmonds*

Whenever you pick up a book in translation you cannot help wondering what is so special about this particular book to warrant the efforts of a translator. This state-

ment is not an attempt to judge the art of translation or to criticize the individual translator, but a realization of the enormously difficult task entailed in the translation of any piece of literature, where the sound of words is a factor determining the final product. This is particularly true in a work such as Tove Ditlevsen's *Early Spring*.

Ditlevsen is, as Nunnally notes in her introduction, "one of Denmark's best loved and most read authors." First and foremost, she is a poet. This is evident also in her prose writings. Her language is clear

and approachable, her diction is colourful and sharp, and her style is economical. Her illustrations, painted with irony and humour, conjure up thought-provoking images that will remain in the mind of the reader.

*Early Spring* is the part of Ditlevsen's autobiography that covers her childhood and youth. In the telling of her story the author is intensely personal and at the same time uniquely universal. The events are peculiarly Danish, in some cases peculiarly Copenhagen, but the feelings they evoke both in the child Tove and in the

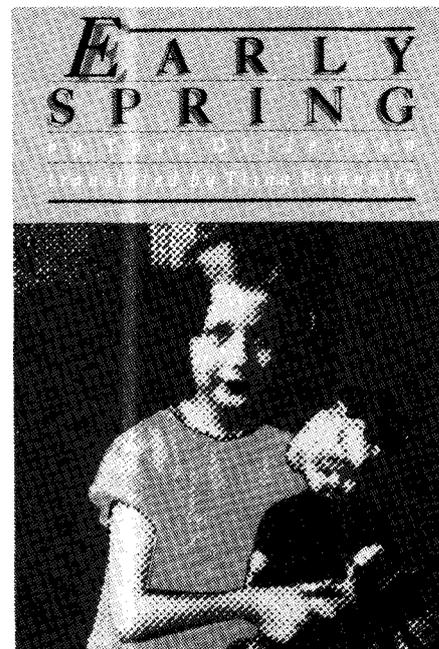
reader are universal. It does not matter that the author and the reader are separated by socio-economic conditions, or indeed, by distance and language. Whatever the outward differences, the inner feelings of Tove will be instantly recognized by readers everywhere.

Tove Ditlevsen grows up in a family where touching is suspect and any expression of love non-existent. Times are hard in Copenhagen during the 1930s for members of the working class. Her socialist father and her non-political mother are as different as if they "come from different planets." She quickly learns that pretence is a way of survival, and she suffers greatly for the discrepancies between reality and truth that she sees around her. Her mother and brother laugh at her fondness for words and attribute it to her "oddness," an obvious result of reading too much. Her father tells her in no uncertain terms that poetry writing is not a pursuit for a girl.

In desperation she begins a long search for someone, anyone, with whom she can share her inner thoughts and dreams. Several times she believes that she has found this person, but she is continually disappointed. There is her grandmother, with whom she shares a love for the old hymns. There is her beautiful, but superficial, girlfriend. Later on, there are

any number of young men, of whom she hopes that at least one will be turned, by love, into that perfect friend. There is the editor of the *Social-Demokraten's Sunday Magazine*, who sees the potential in this gangling, shy fourteen year old girl. There is the old antiquarian bookseller, with whom she feels a silent understanding based on their common love of books. But it is not till she meets Viggo F. Møller, editor of a small literary magazine, that she knows instinctively that she has found what she has been looking for all her life. For the first time she does not feel alone. This man is the key to that other world that she knows is there, but has never been able to catch hold of.

*Early Spring* reads as a novel about the maturing of an ugly duckling that finds consolation in the sounds of words, into a beautiful swan that writes poetry. At the same time, the reader is treated to a long line of authentic characters, who in their own peculiar ways help fill out the plumage on that truly northern bird. It is a story of a determined spirit that prevails in spite of the destructive forces around it. Tove Ditlevsen finally understands the impact of a cold, bleak childhood and a precarious adolescence on her development into a very special human being and an artist. Hans Christian Andersen's words on the plight of the artist: "First you go through



such an awful lot — then you become famous," aptly describe Ditlevsen's experience; she does go through a lot and she does become famous.

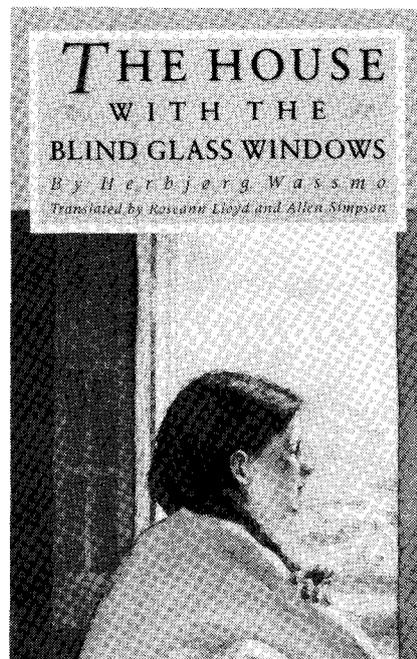
*Early Spring* will appeal to readers of both sexes and varied ages because of the universality of the author's profound insight into human nature and human relationships, and because the flowing style of the narrative sustains the attention of the reader throughout. This is a credit to both author and translator.

## THE HOUSE WITH THE BLIND GLASS WINDOWS

Herbjørg Wassmo. Translated by Roseann Lloyd and Allen Simpson. Seattle, Washington: The Seal Press, 1987.

### Seija Paddon

The Christian adage 'not everything dies,' *non omnis moriar*, assumes a mythology of its own in Herbjørg Wassmo's novel, *The House with the Blind Glass Windows*. Not unlike the defenseless holothurian which, when in danger, splits itself in two and leaves one half to be devoured by its predator in order to escape in the other, Tora, the sexually abused girl who is the central character in Wassmo's novel, intuitively understands the value of self-sectioning as the only means of survival. When in danger, she imagines two



distinctly separate bodily selves; the helpless and powerless one has to suffer abuse and defeat, the other escapes — whole in

itself — and ultimately at the novel's close, achieves a dramatic victory.

The novel, the first volume in a trilogy about Tora, was originally written in Norwegian; the author is the winner of the 1986 Nordic Prize for Literature. The English translation ably reflects what I take to be the lyricism in the 'original' text. The novel's setting is the bleak landscape of a fishing village in the archipelago of northern Norway where nature and climate conspire to test the many-faceted notion of survival in equally many-faceted ways. The narrative commentary on nature's overwhelming presence runs the expressive gamut from sheer exasperation to wonder that barely finds words. The fall — when "the good Lord had sunk all of October and November at the bottom of a sea of fog...with an irritating moon that promised a bright tomorrow and lied" — finds its contrast in February, when the sun returns and is visible above the old, snow-covered tiled roofs, when