J. P. JACOBSEN

MARIE GRUBBE

J. P. Jacobsen

Marie Grubbe

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Introduction

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In J. P. Jacobsen’s Marie Grubbe, the tug of unruly desire presses against the buttresses of rank, marriage, and custom, as a woman’s search for an authentic life remakes and imperils the arrangements meant to contain her, and the story moves from gilded chambers to rough roads to show how private longing meets public judgment, how the body’s urgencies contest the mind’s ideals, and how every choice, whether tender or defiant, becomes both a self-definition and a reckoning with the quiet, persistent powers of family, property, and time, that outlast youthful promises.

First published in 1876, Marie Grubbe is a historical novel by the Danish writer J. P. Jacobsen, often associated with the rise of realism and naturalism in Scandinavian literature. Based on a seventeenth-century noblewoman, the book inhabits Denmark’s courts, estates, and rural environs, observing manners, speech, and material life with an exacting, sensuous eye. While its period setting invites romance and pageantry, Jacobsen’s method is rigorously psychological and calmly unsentimental, attuned to motive, atmosphere, and the slow turn of seasons. Readers encounter an early modern world, but they do so through a modern consciousness that tests received values against lived experience.

At the outset, Marie is introduced within the protections and strictures of rank, surrounded by expectations regarding beauty, marriage, and obedience that promise security yet threaten to stifle curiosity and feeling. The opening

movements follow her education in courtly perception, early attachments, and the cautious negotiations of kin, tutors, and suitors, sketching a world where decisions are brokered as much by property and position as by temperament. Jacobsen allows the horizon to widen patiently, letting circumstance and temperament shape each other, so that small gestures, private hesitations, and the weather of a room reveal the workings of a life beginning to diverge.

The narration is third-person yet markedly intimate, filtering public scenes through the textures of sensation and the half-articulate motions of thought. Jacobsen’s prose is richly descriptive without ornament for its own sake, attentive to light, color, and the tactility of objects, and to how such particulars register morally. Dialogue is sparing and pointed; set pieces develop like tableaux that hold both beauty and pressure. The pacing is deliberate, not diffuse: episodes accumulate rather than sprint, and transitions feel like the turning of weather rather than the snapping of plot machinery, giving readers the pleasure of immersion and the sting of recognition.

Central themes emerge with clarity and nuance: the tension between desire and duty; the interplay of gender, power, and property; the forms of freedom available within and against social scripts; and the education of feeling, from youthful intoxication to seasoned discernment. The novel studies how ideals, once thrilling, become burdens or blinders, and how bodily knowledge asserts claims that polished doctrine cannot nullify. It also tracks class as lived experience rather than abstraction, showing how privilege confers protections that are inseparable from constraint. Throughout, history is not mere backdrop but an active medium shaping options, risks, and the meanings of transgression.

For contemporary readers, Marie Grubbe matters because its questions remain urgent: What does it mean to choose oneself when choices are structured by family capital, social reputation, and inherited scripts of femininity and masculinity? How do we separate genuine vocation from the glamour of rebellion, or enduring attachment from the intoxication of novelty? Jacobsen’s psychological tact clears space for reflection rather than judgment, inviting readers to consider the costs of autonomy alongside its dignity. Its attention to embodiment and environment speaks to current conversations about consent, power, and care, while its skepticism toward easy resolutions resists the consolations of formula.

As a major nineteenth-century work of Danish prose, the novel endures for the rigor of its craft and the seriousness with which it treats a single life across time. Its historical textures satisfy the curiosity that draws us to another century, yet its modern sensibility keeps the book at an intimate distance from nostalgia. Without announcing theses, it dramatizes conflicts that persist wherever institutions and dreams meet. Readers who allow its patient cadences to work upon them will find a narrative that rewards close attention, illuminates vexed questions of love and independence, and offers companionship in the difficult art of choosing a life.

Synopsis

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Published in 1876, J. P. Jacobsen’s Marie Grubbe portrays the life of a seventeenth-century Danish noblewoman through an exacting, psychologically probing lens. Drawing on a historical figure yet pursuing its own literary truth, the novel traces Marie from girlhood into adulthood across country estates and the royal sphere, observing how temperament and circumstance collide. Jacobsen builds a patient portrait of a spirited character chafing against the forms of rank, religion, and decorum. The opening movements establish a world of rigid privilege and tacit constraints, where early gestures of curiosity, desire, and self-assertion begin to unsettle the familial routines shaping her expectations.

As Marie comes of age, she enters courtly society, encountering the glamour and calculation that accompany alliance-making. Admired for her presence yet scrutinized for propriety, she learns the language of favor and reputation. A marriage of high standing promises security and influence, yet the union exposes the premarital ideals as fragile. Scenes of festivity and protocol reveal the subtle coercions of status, while private moments bring into relief her impatience with conventional duty. Jacobsen’s measured narration registers both the allure of privilege and the cost of becoming an ornament within it, preparing the ground for fissures that will widen into crisis.

The novel follows the cooling of affection and the rise of suspicion, mapping how social ambition clashes with Marie’s wish for personal sovereignty. Jealousy and slights, large

and small, accumulate; the marriage becomes a theater of surveillance and defensive pride. Transfers of household and setting—between court, provincial residences, and travel—do not repair the fundamental mismatch of values. Jacobsen avoids melodrama, letting hard looks, terse exchanges, and minute decisions signal the erosion of trust. The narrator’s attention to material detail, gesture, and season keeps the psychological drama grounded, even as Marie begins to consider exits that threaten scandal and exile.

After rupture comes a period of uncertain recalibration. Marie tests new arrangements that promise respectability while hinting at a freer self, moving among relatives, patrons, and suitors whose motives are never purely disinterested. She balances calculation with yearning, bargaining for room to breathe without surrendering the intensity that defines her. Jacobsen sketches the pressures exerted by property, lineage, and the law, all of which constrict a woman’s avenues of change. Yet the narrative also registers the exhilaration that follows when she acts on her own judgment, even as the social ledger tallies costs that will not be easy to repay.

A decisive turn arrives with an attachment that crosses class boundaries, forcing a reckoning between desire and station. What begins as a defiant refusal of prescribed roles deepens into a test of loyalty, endurance, and self-knowledge. Alienated from former allies, Marie learns the precariousness of life beyond aristocratic protections: money thins, work intrudes, and reputation hardens into a verdict. Jacobsen neither condemns nor sentimentalizes her choice, instead tracing how passion can become a discipline, reshaping everyday habits, expectations, and horizons. The narrative lingers on sensory life—weather, labor, domestic spaces—to show how love and necessity interweave in stubborn, ordinary time.

In later chapters, the book adopts a quieter register, observing years that blend effort with resignation and occasional flare-ups of hope. Secondary figures drift in and out, marking stages of decline or stability, and testing how much of a person’s early promise can survive altered circumstances. Marie’s voice, sometimes proud, sometimes reflective, anchors these episodes, which avoid grand revelations in favor of cumulative insight. The settings grow humbler, the choices more constrained, yet a distinctive resolve persists. Jacobsen’s art lies in the steadiness of attention: character is revealed not by a single climax, but through persistence in changed weather.

Without resorting to moral verdicts or sensational turns, Marie Grubbe stands as an early landmark of Scandinavian psychological realism and naturalist inquiry. It interrogates the exchange rate between freedom and respectability, desire and duty, offering a historically situated yet enduring study of female agency under constraint. Jacobsen’s patient craft, grounded in concrete observation and subtle irony, gives the life its shape without dictating its meaning. The closing pages are sober and humane, inviting readers to weigh the costs of self-assertion in a society built to contain it. The novel continues to resonate for its unsparing clarity and compassionate gaze.

Historical Context

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J. P. Jacobsen’s novel Marie Grubbe was published in 1876 in Denmark, amid the movement known as the Modern Breakthrough. Jacobsen (1847–1885), a writer and natural scientist, helped introduce realism and naturalism to Danish prose. The book reimagines the life of the historical noblewoman Marie Grubbe (1643–1718) and follows her through seventeenth-century Denmark-Norway. Anchored in period detail, it emphasizes material conditions and psychological motives rather than romantic idealization. By situating a woman’s personal choices within rigid hierarchies, court protocols, and church oversight, the novel presents the era’s institutions not as picturesque background but as decisive forces shaping possibilities, desires, and reputations.

The narrative’s principal setting is the composite monarchy of Denmark-Norway, where absolute monarchy was established in 1660 after a crisis of war and finance. The Kongeloven (Lex Regia) of 1665 codified hereditary, indivisible royal power. Lutheranism functioned as state church since the Reformation of 1536, with bishops and consistories regulating morals and marriage. Copenhagen served as political and administrative center, housing the royal court, chancelleries, and the University of Copenhagen. Society remained stratified into estates, with the titled nobility exercising authority on landed estates and in royal service. This institutional framework governs status,

mobility, and the sanctions surrounding conduct and marriage.

Seventeenth-century Denmark was repeatedly shaped by war with Sweden. The Dano-Swedish conflicts of 1657–1660 ended with the Treaty of Roskilde (1658), which ceded Scania, Halland, and Blekinge to Sweden; Bornholm returned to Danish control in 1660. The Scanian War (1675–1679) reopened hostilities, while the Norwegian theater, known as the Gyldenløve War, was led by Ulrik Frederik Gyldenløve as viceroy. The Great Northern War began in 1700, drawing Denmark in and out of coalitions. Campaigns, levies, and shifting borders affected aristocratic careers, estate finances, and court priorities, providing the novel’s backdrop of insecurity, opportunity, and reputational hazard at court and in the provinces.

Economically, the realm depended on Baltic trade and the Øresund toll collected at Helsingør, while mercantilist policies fostered chartered companies and royal manufactories. Copenhagen and coastal towns grew as administrative and commercial hubs. Court culture under Frederick III (r. 1648–1670) and Christian V (r. 1670–1699) adopted French fashions, ceremonial hierarchies, and new hereditary titles such as counties and baronies (created in 1671). Court appointments, hunting, and patronage structured advancement. Baroque ideals shaped display, rhetoric, and architecture. These norms defined comportment, sociability, and honor among the elite, and deviations from them carried social costs that the narrative registers in interactions, invitations, and official favor.

Marriage, property, and gender were legally and socially regulated. After the Reformation, consistorial courts and royal authorities oversaw marriage formation and discipline; divorce existed but on narrow grounds, principally adultery

or abandonment. Among nobles, marriages served to consolidate alliances and property, with family negotiations and, at times, royal consent weighing heavily. Women of rank were commonly educated in religion, languages, and household management, and their legal personhood was tightly connected to guardianship under father or husband. Inheritance practices aimed to preserve estates within lineages. This regime of kinship, dowry, and reputation underlies the novel’s conflicts over desire, status, and acceptable conduct.

Marie Grubbe herself was a historical Danish noblewoman, born in 1643 and later associated with the royal court. She married Ulrik Frederik Gyldenløve, the acknowledged illegitimate son of Frederick III and viceroy of Norway, in 1660; the marriage ended in divorce in 1670. Subsequently, she entered further marriages that took her away from court circles into more provincial surroundings. Her life became emblematic in Denmark for marked shifts in social position. Jacobsen uses documented episodes, locations, and personages to trace how court politics, family strategies, and legal strictures intersect with a woman’s temperament and choices, without altering the broader historical record.

Jacobsen wrote under the influence of contemporary science and criticism. He conducted botanical research and, in the early 1870s, translated Charles Darwin’s work into Danish, helping to disseminate evolutionary ideas. Georg Brandes’s 1871 lectures launched the Modern Breakthrough, urging literature to debate society, gender, and belief. Women’s rights associations, including Dansk Kvindesamfund (founded 1871), were active in public discourse about marriage and morality. European naturalism, associated with authors such as Émile Zola, stressed heredity and environment. These currents shaped Jacobsen’s method: empirical description, attention to causality, and a

willingness to depict female desire and constraint within credible social and institutional settings.

Within this context, the novel functions as a historical case study that reflects and critiques its era. It reconstructs seventeenth-century institutions with documentary care while refusing to idealize aristocratic codes or clerical authority. The plot’s pressures arise from verifiable features of the time—war service, patronage, court ceremony, legal limits on marriage—rather than melodramatic coincidence. By presenting a woman navigating those structures, Jacobsen aligns a past life with modern debates about autonomy, duty, and social rank. The book thus mirrors the Modern Breakthrough’s program: to examine inherited norms with realism and to measure personal aspiration against the durable machinery of power.

Marie Grubbe

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INTRODUCTION

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“Language is like an instrument that requires to be tuned occasionally. A few times in the course of a century the literary language of a country needs to be tuned afresh; for as no generation can be satisfied to think the thoughts of the preceding one, so no group of men in the world of letters can use the language of the school that went before them.” With these words Georg Brandes begins his discussion[1] of the influence of J. P. Jacobsen. As Brandes himself was the critic who found new paths, Jacobsen was the creative artist who moulded his native language into a medium fit for modern ideas. At the time when Denmark and Norway had come to a parting of ways intellectually, and the great Norwegians were forming their own rugged style, Jacobsen gave the Danes a language suited to their needs, subtle, pliant, and finely modulated. He found new methods of approach to truth and even a new manner of seeing nature and humanity. In an age that had wearied of generalities, he emphasized the unique and the characteristic**[1q]**. To a generation that had ceased to accept anything because it was accepted before, he brought the new power of scientific observation in the domain of the mind and spirit. In order to understand him it is necessary to follow the two currents, the one poetic, the other scientific, that ran through his life.

Jens Peter Jacobsen was born in Jutland, in the little town of Thisted, on April 7, 1847, and was the son of a merchant

in moderate circumstances. From his mother he inherited a desire to write poetry, which asserted itself while he was yet a boy. His other chief interest was botany, then a new feature of the school curriculum. He had a fervent love of all plant-life and enjoyed keenly the fairy-tales of Hans Christian Andersen, in which flowers are endowed with personality. At twenty, Jacobsen wrote in his diary that he did not know whether to choose science or poetry for his life-work, since he felt equally drawn to both. He added: “If I could bring into the realm of poetry the eternal laws of nature, its glories, its riddles, its miracles, then I feel that my work would be more than ordinary.”

He was one of the first in Scandinavia to realize the importance of Darwin, and translated *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*, besides writing magazine articles elucidating the principles of evolution. Meanwhile he carried on his botanical research faithfully and, in 1872, won a gold medal in the University at Copenhagen for a thesis on the Danish *desmidiaciae*[1], a microscopic plant growing in the marshes. In the same year, he made his literary debut with a short story, *Mogens*, which compelled attention by the daring originality of its style. From that time on, he seems to have had no doubt that his life-work was literature, though he became primarily a master of prose and not, as he had dreamed in his boyhood, a writer of verse.

In the spring of 1873, he wrote from Copenhagen to Edvard Brandes:[2] “Just think, I get up every morning at eleven and go to the Royal Library, where I read old documents and letters and lies and descriptions of murder, adultery, corn rates, whoremongery, market prices,

gardening, the siege of Copenhagen, divorce proceedings, christenings, estate registers, genealogies, and funeral sermons. All this is to become a wonderful novel to be called ‘Mistress Marie Grubbe, Interiors from the Seventeenth Century.’ You remember, she is the one who is mentioned in Holberg’s Epistles and in *The Goose Girl* by Andersen, and who was first married to U. F. Gyldenlöve**[2]** and afterwards to a ferryman.”

When the first two chapters were finished, an advance honorarium from his publisher enabled him to follow his longing and make a trip to the south of Europe, but his stay there was cut short by an attack of the insidious lung disease that was, eventually, to end his life. At Florence, he had a hemorrhage and was obliged to return home to Thisted, where the family physician declared his illness to be mortal. He recovered partially and lived to write his great works, but for eleven years his life was a constant struggle with physical disability.

Marie Grubbe cost him nearly four years of labor, during which time he published nothing except a short story, *Et Skud i Taagen* (“A Shot in the Mist”), and a few poems. The first two chapters of his novel appeared under the title *Marie Grubbes Barndom* (“The Childhood of Marie Grubbe”), and were printed in October, 1873, in a monthly magazine, *Det nittende Aarhundrede*, edited by Edvard and Georg Brandes. The completed book was published in December, 1876, and had sufficient popular success to warrant a second edition in February. Conservative critics, however, needed time to adjust themselves to so startling a novelty, and one reviewer drew from Georg Brandes the retort that certain

people ought to wear blue goggles when looking at a style so full of color.

Long before he had finished *Marie Grubbe*, Jacobsen felt a new novel taking shape in his mind. It was to be the story of a modern youth and be called *Niels Lyhne*. It was written, bit by bit, in Thisted and abroad, and did not appear until December, 1880, four years after *Marie Grubbe*. In the latter, he had written of Renaissance types, sensual, full-blooded, and impulsive; only in Sti Högh, who was always cutting up the timber of life into thought-shavings, had he foreshadowed that modern reflectiveness which Heidenstam calls the curse of the nineteenth century. Niels Lyhne is the embodiment of this spirit, and is generally accepted as Jacobsen's self-portrait, although the events of the story are not those of the author's life. F. Hansen calls it[3] "a casting up of accounts with life by a man whom death had marked. Thence its Pindaric elevation of thought and expression. It is instinct with a spirit like a swan that rises and rises, on broad, slow wings, till it is lost to sight." It expresses Jacobsen's struggle, not only against the bodily weakness that laid its paralyzing hand on his faculties, but also against the sluggish, dreamy blood he had inherited, which made all creative work an agonizing effort.

Niels Lyhne is an outsider from life. He seems never to fill any particular place in his world. He has a poetic gift and high artistic ideals, but never writes. Two women leave him for other men less fine and lovable. Finally, he returns to his old home and family traditions, to manage his father's estate, and to marry a sweet young girl, the daughter of an old neighbor. She and her child are taken away from him by

death, and in her last illness she forsakes the atheism he has taught her and turns to the old religion, leaving Niels with a baffled sense that her spirit has left him even before the parting in death. At last Niels himself dies “the difficult death”—the closing words of the book.

This is perhaps the place to say a few words about the atheism that is a dreary side of Jacobsen’s rich and brilliant personality. Early in life, he became convinced that human beings must rid themselves of the idea that any supernatural power would interfere between themselves and their deeds. He saw a supreme moral value in the doctrine of evolution with its principle of a universe governed by laws of cause and effect. In *Niels Lyhne* he emphasized again and again the bitter theory that no one ever added an inch to his height by dreams, or changed the consequences of good and evil by wishes and aspirations. Niels tries to instill into himself and his wife the courage to face life as it is, without taking refuge from realities in a world of dreams. Further than this, Jacobsen attacked no sincere faith. It would be interesting to search out how far, since his day, his principle of the immutability of law has penetrated religious thought, but that would be beyond the scope of this sketch.

For eight years, while writing his two novels, Jacobsen had lived in his little native town in Jutland with occasional trips to the south. After the completion of *Niels Lyhne*, he resumed his place in the literary circles of Copenhagen, which he had shunned—so he humbly confessed—because he was ashamed of never getting anything finished. His old diffidence seemed to have left him; to the sweetness and

quiet whimsicality that had always endeared him to his friends he added a new poise and assurance. He was deeply gratified by the reception given *Niels Lyhne* by people whose opinion he valued, and when he was told that Ibsen was reading it aloud to his evening circle, and had pronounced it the best book of its kind in modern literature, he characteristically remarked that this was pleasant to hear, even though John Poulson (Ibsen's friend and biographer) no doubt exaggerated a little.

This period of Jacobsen's life was in many ways a happy one, in spite of his declining health. He had his old lodgings and lived there with the same puritanic simplicity as in his student days, and indeed his books never brought him enough money to live otherwise, but he revelled in a luxurious couch, the gift of anonymous women admirers, and in the flowers with which his friends kept his rooms filled. He wrote at this time a few short stories, among them *Pesten i Bergamo* ("The Plague at Bergamo") and *Fru Fönss*. The latter tells of a woman in middle life who had the courage to grasp the happiness that youth had denied her. She dies, and her farewell letter to her children gives Jacobsen the opportunity to express the longing to be remembered which he could never have brought himself to utter in his own person. "Those who are about to die are always poor. I am poor; for all this beautiful world, which has been my rich, blessed home for so many years, is to be taken from me. My chair will be empty; the door will be closed after me, and I shall never set my foot there again. Therefore I look on everything with a prayer in my eyes that it will love me; therefore I come to you and beg you to love

me with all the love you once gave me. Remember that to be loved is all the part I shall have in the world of men. Only to be remembered, nothing more."

With the last remnant of his strength, Jacobsen recast his poems, which were published after his death. Finally, when his illness could no longer be fought off, he went home to Thisted to be cared for by his mother and brother. There he died, on April 30, 1885, as quietly and bravely as he had lived.

The importance of the two short volumes that contain Jacobsen's complete works has been more fully realized as they have been seen in the perspective of time. His poems, though few in number, are exquisite. With *Niels Lyhne*, he introduced the psychological novel in Denmark. While at work on it, he wrote a friend that after all the only interesting thing was "the struggle of one or more human beings for existence, that is their struggle against the existing order of things for their right to exist in their own way." Vilhelm Andersen points[4] to these casual words as marking the cleavage between the old and the new, saying: "Before *Niels Lyhne*, the poetic was the general; after this book, the poetic became the personal. The literature whose foremost representative is Adam Oehlenschläger had for its aim the exaltation of the things common to humanity; the art in which J. P. Jacobsen became the first master has only one purpose, the presentation and elucidation of the individual."

Jacobsen has himself told us his ideal of style in a paragraph of *Niels Lyhne*, where he lets Fru Boye attack the generalities of Oehlenschläger's description in his poem *The*

Mermaid visits King Helge. “I want a luxuriant, glowing picture,” she exclaims. “I want to be initiated into the mysterious beauty of such a mermaid body, and I ask of you, what can I make of lovely limbs with a piece of gauze spread over them?—Good God!—No, she should have been naked as a wave and with the wild lure of the sea about her. Her skin should have had something of the phosphorescence of the summer ocean and her hair something of the black, tangled horror of the seaweed. Am I not right? Yes, and a thousand tints of the water should come and go in the changeful glitter of her eyes. Her pale breast must be cool with a voluptuous coolness, and her limbs have the flowing lines of the waves. The power of the maelstrom must be in her kiss, and the yielding softness of the foam in the embrace of her arms.” In the same passage, Jacobsen praises the vitality of Shakespeare’s style as a contrast to that of the Danish romanticists.

His search for unique and characteristic expressions had free play in *Marie Grubbe*, where he could draw on the store of quaint archaic and foreign words he unearthed in his preliminary studies. To avoid the harsh staccato of the North, he made full use of the redundant words and unaccented syllables that were more common in the old Danish than in the modern, and thereby he gained the effect of prose rhythm. While discarding outworn phrases, he often coins new words, as for instance when he is not satisfied to let the sunlight play on the wings of the doves circling around Frederiksborg castle, or even to make the sunlight golden, but must needs fashion the word “sungold” (*solguld*), which in two syllables is the concentrated essence

of what he wishes to say. Sometimes he gives a sharper edge to a common expression merely by changing the usual order of two coupled words, as when he speaks of Ulrik Christian as slim and tall, instead of tall and slim—a minute touch that really adds vividness to the picture.

The habit of looking for characteristic features, which he had acquired in his botanical studies, became an apt tool of his creative faculty. Sometimes his descriptions seem overloaded with details, as when he uses two pages to tell about the play of the firelight in the little parlor at Aggershus, where Marie Grubbe sits singing to the tones of her lute. Yet the images never blur nor overlap one another. Every word deepens the central idea: the sport of the storm with the fire and the consequent struggle between light and darkness in the room. Not only that, but the entire description ministers subtly to the allurement of the woman at the hearth. Almost any writer except J. P. Jacobsen would have told us how the light played on Marie Grubbe's hair and face, but he prefers to let us feel her personality through her environment. This is true also of his outdoor pictures, where he uses his flower-lore to good advantage, as in the first chapter of *Marie Grubbe*, where we find the lonely, wayward child playing in the old luxuriant, neglected garden full of a tangle of quaint old-fashioned flowers. But when she returns to the home of her childhood, we hear no more of the famous Tjele garden except as a place to raise vegetables in; her later history is sketched on a background of heathery hill, permeated with a strong smell of sun-scorched earth, which somehow suggests the harsh, physical realities of life in the class she has entered.

Another means in his favorite method of indirect approach to a personality is through woman's dress. Marie Grubbe's attire—from the lavender homespun and billowing linen ruffles of the young maiden to the more sophisticated daintiness of Ulrik Frederik's bride in madder red robe and clocked stockings, the slovenly garb of Palle Dyre's wife, and finally the neat simple gown marred by a tawdry brocaded cap which she dons when she falls in love with Sören—is a complete index to her moral fall and rise. Sofie Urne's shabby velvet, her trailing plumes and red-nosed shoes, are equally characteristic of her tarnished attractions, and when her lover bends rapturously over the slim, white hand which is "not quite clean" we know exactly the nature of the charm she exercises, though Jacobsen never comments on her character, as an author of the older school would have done. Nor does he ask our sympathy for Marie Grubbe, but he lets us feel all the promise and the tragedy of her life in the description of her eyes as a young girl—a paragraph of marvellous poignant beauty.

Jacobsen once jestingly compared himself to the sloth (*det berömte Dovendyr Ai-ai*) which needed two years to climb to the top of a tree. It was necessary for him to withdraw absolutely from the world and to retire, as it were, within the character he wished to portray before he could set pen to paper. It cannot be denied that the laboriousness of the process is sometimes perceptible in his finished work. His style became too gorgeous in color, too heavy with fragrance. Yet there were signs that Jacobsen's genius was freeing itself from the faults of over-richness. The very last prose that came from his hand, *Fru Fönss*, has a clarified

simplicity that has induced critics to place it at the very head of his production. Indeed, it is difficult to say to what heights of artistic accomplishment he might have risen had his life been spared beyond the brief span of thirty-eight years. As it is, the books he left us are still, of their kind, unsurpassed in the North.

The translation of *Marie Grubbe* (a book which Brandes has called one of the greatest *tours de force* in Danish literature) was a task to be approached with diffidence. The author does not reconstruct exactly, in his dialogue, the language of the period; nor have I attempted it. Even had I been able to do so, the racy English of the Restoration would have been an alien medium for the flourishes and pomposities of Jacobsen's Danish. On the other hand, it would clearly have been unfair to the author to turn his work into ordinary modern English and so destroy that stiff, rich fabric of curious, archaic words and phrases which he had been at such pains to weave. There seemed only one course open: to follow the original, imitating as far as possible its color and texture, even though the resultant language may not be of any particular time or place. The translation has been a task, but also a pleasure. To live intimately for months with Jacobsen's style is to find beauty within beauty and truth within truth like "rose upon rose in flowering splendor."

H. A. L.

New York, July 1, 1917.

Dano-Swedish conflicts (mid-1600s) and was subsequently condemned in Denmark for treason; he is historically remembered as a leading collaborator with the Swedish enemy.

14 Gabions are large cylindrical baskets or cages—traditionally woven from wicker—filled with earth, sand, or stones and used in siege and field fortifications to build revetments, breastworks, or to protect troops; they were common in early modern European military engineering.

15 The saraband (often spelled sarabande) and the pavan (pavane) are courtly dances from the Renaissance and Baroque periods: the pavan is a slow, processional dance, while the saraband (of probable Spanish origin) became a slower, stately dance in later centuries, both commonly performed at aristocratic assemblies.

16 The name refers to a well-known European folktale character (also called Hop-o'-My-Thumb or Tom Thumb) about a very small boy; here it is used as a nickname for the inn-guest, signalling a comic or diminutive persona familiar from popular tales.

17 Vordingborg is a town in Denmark historically notable for its medieval royal castle and fortress; in the period of the novel holding Vordingborg "in fief" would mean holding the estate or its revenues by grant from the king.

18 Refers to an early-modern assembly of the realm’s estates (nobility, clergy, burghers and sometimes peasants) convened by the monarch to discuss taxation, privileges and legislation; in 17th-century Denmark such meetings were irregular and often called the ‘Stænder’ or Estates General.

19 A high governmental office in early modern monarchies, this denotes a senior member of the king’s privy council who advised the sovereign and often carried administrative, judicial or diplomatic duties and social prestige.

20 A French rendering of the Spanish title 'Grandee of Spain,' an honorary rank or dignity granted by the Spanish crown that conferred high precedence and privileges; in the 17th century it was sometimes bestowed on foreign nobles or royal favourites as a mark of favour.

21 Frederiksborg Castle is a historic royal residence in Hillerød, Denmark, used by the Danish royal family for court life and ceremonies from the early modern period onward and often associated with summer stays and court festivities.

22 A historical trick-taking gambling card game (also called 'loo' or 'lanterloo') popular in early modern Europe and Britain, played for stakes with a pot and penalties for failing to win tricks.

23 The title of the ballet/masquerade presented in the chapter; a German phrase meaning roughly 'Woodland Delight' and typical of court entertainments that combined dance, music, and pastoral theatre in the 17th–18th century style.

24 A high-ranking princely title in the Holy Roman Empire; an 'Elector' was a territorial ruler with the hereditary privilege of participating in the election of the Emperor, and the Elector of Saxony denotes the holder of that office in the Saxony territory.

25 A ballet term (French for 'step of two') denoting a dance duet for two performers, commonly used in classical and court ballets to showcase partnered choreography.

26 A Viceroy was the king’s representative and chief governor of Norway within the Denmark–Norway realm; in the 17th century the office combined civil and military authority and was normally held by Danish nobles.

27 Aggershus (often spelled Akershus in modern sources) refers to the medieval fortress and castle in present-day Oslo that served as a royal residence, administrative center and military stronghold in the 17th century.

28 Rix-dollars (also spelled rixdaler or rigsdaler) were silver currency units used in Denmark–Norway and parts of northern Europe in the 17th century; their exact value varied by time and place.

29 An ecclesiastical council or church court that advised royal authority and dealt with moral and matrimonial matters; in 17th-century Denmark such a body could issue reports used to inform secular courts and the king’s decisions.

30 Sjæland (modern Danish Sjælland, English Zealand) is the largest island of Denmark and includes Copenhagen; here it denotes the region Marie leaves behind.

31 Lübeck is a historic port city on the Baltic coast of northern Germany, long famed as the leading city of the Hanseatic League and a major medieval trading centre.

32 Tjele likely refers to Tjele, a parish/estate in central Jutland (near Viborg) in Denmark; in the text it denotes rural meadows or an estate region Marie wishes to escape.

33 A postern is a secondary or back door or gate (often small) in a wall or building; inns and fortifications commonly had posterns used as side exits.

34 Literally French for 'The Iron Cross', this was a common historical name for inns or taverns in Europe; in the passage it denotes the house/establishment of which Isabel Gilles is the landlady and from which Marie and Sti Högh rented their apartment.

35 A Latin phrase meaning 'remember (that you have) to die', used in European art and literature as a reminder of human mortality; here the speaker invokes it to express an aged person's reluctance to dwell on death and decline.

36 Palle Dyre is the man Marie marries and is described in the text as a royal ‘counsellor of justice’ (a judicial official); in the narrative he is her husband and master of the household.

37 ‘Ulrik Frederik’ likely refers to Ulrik Frederik Gyldenløve (1638–1704), a prominent Danish noble and viceroy of Norway, and here denotes the husband from whom Marie was divorced; this identification is probable but not explicitly stated in the text.

38 Cyprianus appears as a name from popular tales mentioned by a servant — a figure said to survive burning or drowning and return — suggesting a folkloric or legendary character associated with death-defying stories, rather than a literal historical person.

39 Mogens Scheel is named in the father’s petition as the royal governor he asks to investigate Marie’s conduct; he is presented as a crown official to whom the King might entrust inquiry, and likely denotes a contemporary noble or official of that period.

40 Borringholm is cited in the supplication as the place where Marie’s father asks she be confined; in context it is a place-name (probably an estate or locality in Denmark)