

Erlend Loe, *Sedus*, Traducere din limba norvegiană de: Lavinia Alexandra Chira, Simina Corodescu, Ecaterina Miruna Dumitrașcu, Alexandra Casandra Kovacs, Mădălina Marin, Alexandra Melenciuc, Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2022, 155 pp.

In the preface to *New Explanations: Readings of Norwegian Literature from the 1990s* [*Nye forklaringer: Lesninger av Norsk 1990-tallslitteratur*], Per Arne Michelsen and Marianne Røskeland have chosen a number of keywords in order to describe the Norwegian literature of the time: ‘family’, ‘body’, ‘reality’, ‘irony’, ‘naivism’, and ‘God’. With the exception of the last keyword, all of the above are extremely appropriate descriptors of Erlend Loe’s debut novel, *Tatt av kvinnen*, now available in a Romanian translation from Norwegian. The keyword ‘God’ is more fitting for Loe’s following novel, *Naiv.Super*, which is in a way a continuation of the first, where an identity crisis becomes the main theme.

The choice of title for the Romanian translation of *Tatt av kvinnen* is a good one: *Sedus* [Seduced] contains the main meaning of the novel, that of being mesmerized by somebody, and also a secondary one, namely ‘dus’, which keeps the meaning of ‘tatt’ (or ‘gone’) from the Norwegian original. This play of words in titles is important for Loe. His breakthrough novel from 1993 (published by Cappelen) was adapted for the big screen in 2007. The title of the movie was *Gone With The Woman*, in Norwegian *Tatt av kvinnen*, an ironic take on Margaret Mitchell’s title for her classic novel *Gone With The Wind*.

Loe’s novel *Sedus* [Seduced] appeared in Romanian translation courtesy of the publishing house Casa Cărții de Știință from Cluj-Napoca, Romania, in the collection “Nordica”, the only one at a national level dedicated to Nordic literature. The well-designed book cover, showcasing the main themes and symbols of the novel, was created by student Lavinia Alexandra Chira. Moreover, the translation is the result of the work of students from the optional course “Translation and interculturality (Norwegian, English, Romanian)”, at the master level, in the second semester of their first year (academic year 2020–2021). The course is held at the Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literatures of the Faculty of Letters from the Babeș-Bolyai University, where the coordinator of the project was the Norwegian studies scholar Sanda Tomescu Baciuc. It is also worth noting that the translation was subsidized by NORLA (Norwegian Literature Abroad).

In the introduction to the Romanian version, Ecaterina Miruna Dumitrașcu describes the benefits of working with the original and not with an indirect translation. Thus, the morphologic and stylistic particularities of the Norwegian original are kept. However, as Dumitrașcu points out, there are certain areas in which adaptation was a more viable solution, such as the syntax and the topics,



Figure 1. First Romanian translation of the novel *Gone With The Woman* by Erlend Loe. Design by Lavinia Alexandra Chira  
Source: <https://www.casacartii.ro/editura/carte/sedus/> (accessed: 14.11.2024).

in order to keep the interior rhythm of the prose, and the use of colloquial register and slang, to keep the simplicity of the original naïve style.

With regard to the literary movement to which the novel belongs, Dumitrașcu states the following: “The postmodernism of Erlend Loe manifests itself by hiding social critique behind the masque of an apparent naïve art. His simple language gives way to psychological subtleties and true identity crises that seldom come to the surface, being presented in a humorous way. The cathartic tendency to laugh in the face of the tragic penetrates the entire novel” (Introduction, p. 6) [“Postmodernismul lui Erlend Loe se manifestă prin ascunderea criticii sociale sub o aparentă artă naivă. Limbajul său simplu redă subtilități psihologice și adevărate crize de identitate care ies rareori la suprafață, fiind prezentate mai degrabă cu umor. Tendința cathartică de a râde în fața tragicului permează în toată tematica romanului”].

The main theme of the novel is fragmented reality, something that is mirrored by the use of 300 short fragments which are in turn divided into three parts. Much like a journal, this visual, technical form of writing is inspired by Jean-Philippe

Toussaint's debut novel, *The Bathroom* (*La Salle de Bains*, 1985), which in turn goes back to Pascal's *Thoughts* (*Pensées*, 1670). The sentences reflect the protagonists' immature and alienated ways of being as they create an elliptical or laconic effect.

The novel represents a parody of the gender debate novels from the 1980s. In Loe's literary project, gender expectations are now clearly formulated. However, Loe's debut novel manages to invert conventional gender roles that lead to their deconstruction.

As Erik Skjeveland points out in the chapter dedicated to this novel in *New Explanations*, (Chapter 12, pp. 207–219), the novel begins *in media res*. In this way, we encounter the first-person narrator who tells his own story. It begins with Marianne invading his personal space and bringing a chamber of drawers into his apartment without his permission. In this sense, for the unnamed narrator, the yellow chamber of drawers is a symbol of complacency and passivity. This leads to an exploration of the psychological side of the couple's relationship where strict norms are deconstructed.

The novel succeeds in combining entertainment and sharp social critique. As Skjeveland further points out, *Seduced* expresses a will to communicate with the 1990s reader by use of humor, daily symbols, and simple sentence structures. In this respect, Loe wins over his readers.

When discussing the book's originality, Skjeveland uses the concept of 'uncleanness' in order to show the blending together of two different tendencies, one that can be described as 'easy', 'naïve', 'optimistic', and 'funny' seen as entertainment (or 'communication'), and another one that is 'vague', 'grumpy', 'dark' and 'critical', understood as a social critique (or 'existentialism'). This sort of dialectic correlation between concepts clearly transpires in the form of the novel. But we should take into consideration that his debut was also a preparation for his future writings (screenplays, children's literature, theatre plays, or adaptations of his own work). In addition, Loe's personal style should not be regarded as unpretentious as it reflects a naïve way of writing, something that is a conscious decision on the author's part. This naïve style was an intuitive rendering of the *zeitgeist* and its standing as an independent literary style was later confirmed in Loe's successive novels.

The naivism of Norwegian literature of the 1990s can be seen in direct correlation with Generation X and the disillusionment that Loe writes about. When analyzing the couple's interaction, it is their way of communicating that creates the humour, mainly because the man and the woman represent antithetic types, even though their roles are inversed. While Marianne is purely intuitive, that is not the case with the narrator: he is more accustomed to reflection and ironic distance. However, both of them suffer from a form of deception, as we see at the end of the novel.

This new translation of Loe's literary debut into Romanian titled *Sedus* [Seduced], stays faithful to the versions in Danish, Swedish, Finnish, French, German, Dutch, Hungarian, Turkish, Serbian, and Russian, in that it remains a masterpiece of late modernity or, for a more common term, postmodernity.

## Bibliography

Michelsen, P.A., Røskeland, M. (ed.). (2004). *Nye forklaringer: Lesninger av Norsk 1990-tallslitteratur*. LNU's skriftserie. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

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