

Hamsun

2009

Press Pack

The National Commemoration of the 150th
Anniversary of the Birth of Knut Hamsun (1859-1952)

On Overgrown Paths

18 September 8.30 p.m.

at Agder Theatre (Fjæreheia),

Grimstad

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On Overgrown Paths

By Knut Hamsun, adapted by Oda Radoor

The war is over. Knut Hamsun, now 86 years of age, is being held under arrest in Grimstad Hospital accused of treason. He sits waiting - hard of hearing and almost blind. «Could it be that some people are gambling on my old age and hoping I will die of my own accord?»

Fjæreheia is the quarry which the Germans started excavating during the Occupation to secure granite for Hitler's Victory Monument in Berlin. On 18 September Lars Øyno will present parts of *On Overgrown Paths* in Fjære quarry, accompanied by Ingfrid Breie Nyhus (piano) and Agder Vokalensemble. Is it possible to get anywhere along overgrown paths?

The production «On Overgrown Paths» is the last of four national events commemorating the 150th anniversary of the birth of Knut Hamsun. It is presented in Norwegian only. The production was commissioned by the National Library of Norway (Nasjonalbiblioteket) and is a collaboration between The National Touring Theatre of Norway (Riksteatret) and Agder Theatre.

Taking Part

The production «On Overgrown Paths» is based on Knut Hamsun's documentary novel of the same name, published in 1949.

Director: Hilde Andersen

Text adapted by: Oda Radoor.

Actor: Lars Øyno

Pianist: Ingfrid Breie Nyhus

Choir: Agder Vokalensemble

Conductor: Tim Harry Blomberg

Lighting and Video Design: Ola Bråten

Lighting Managers: Kaja Glenne and Daniel Kolstad Gimle

Sound Technician: Per Henning Finstad

Dramaturg: Oda Radoor

Wardrobe: Marianne Sembsmoen

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Make-up: Marianne Log

Information: Hamsun 2009

Production Managers: Kjell Hjelmerud and Ståle Ellingsen

Producer: Beate Svenningsen

Artistic Director of the Hamsun Anniversary Year: Catrine Telle

Thanks to

Oslo Nye Teater, Det Norske Teatret, Fjæreheia Drift, Grimstad bys museer, Grimstad – dikternes by, Norges Musikkhøgskole

Transport

Bus from Grimstad Bus Station (Grimstad rutebilstasjon) to Agder Teater (Fjæreheia) at 7.00 p.m., 7.30 p.m. and 8.00 p.m. Buses will return to Grimstad Bus Station immediately after the performance. Return ticket: NOK 50. Parking at Fjære Church (Fjære kirke), NOK 20. Bus connection to Fjæreheie from Fjære Church.

Other Hamsun events in Grimstad, Saturday 19 September:

10.30 a.m. «In Hamsun's footsteps – On Overgrown Paths»

Hamsun describes the walks he took while under house arrest at Grimstad Hospital in *On Overgrown Paths*. All this walking took its toll on his shoes. On one occasion he decided to send a letter home to ask for new shoes, but no one was willing to post it for him. The prisoner therefore had to take the trip into town himself. We will be following in Hamsun's footsteps through the countryside down to the postbox where he posted this letter to Nørholm. Our guide will be Director of Culture in Grimstad, Bjørn Kristian Pedersen.

Meeting Place: Old Grimstad Hospital (Gamle Grimstad sykehus, Frivoldveien 24). The trip is free of charge. N.B. Some uneven terrain.

12.00 Opening of the exhibition «On Overgrown Paths – a retrospective view» («På gjengrodde stier – med tilbakeblikk»)

Grimstad Artists' Association (Grimstad Kunstforening) is holding a new exhibition by two of the most influential contemporary artists in Norway to mark the 150th anniversary of the birth of Knut Hamsun. Ørnulf Opdahl is exhibiting pictures based on Hamsun in old age and the book *On Overgrown Paths*. Nina Sundbye will be exhibiting sculptures inspired by Hamsun characters such as Victoria, Edvarda, Isak Sellanrå, Ylajali and the first-person narrator in *Hunger (Sult)*. The exhibition will be open until 11 October 2009.

2.00 p.m. Screening of the silent film classic *The Growth of the Soil (Markens Grøde)*

The silent film *The Growth of the Soil* (Gunnar Sommerfeldt, 1921) is a milestone in Norwegian film history. This was the first time a major literary work had been adapted for a Norwegian film and it was also the first Norwegian feature film with original music, composed by Leif Halvorsen. The film has now been restored and can be experienced together with a new recording of the beautiful original music by the Norwegian Radio Orchestra (Kringkastingsorkesteret).

Venue: Grimstad Culture Centre (Grimstad kulturhus, Storgata 33). The screening is free of charge and lasts for approx. 90 minutes.

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On Overgrown Paths (På gjengrodde stier, 1949)

Describing a book is not always an easy task. *On Overgrown Paths*, Knut Hamsun's account of the period between his arrest on 26 May 1945 and the High Court sentence passed on 21 June 1948, is one of the most remarkable documents in Norwegian literary history.

In this work we accompany Hamsun, a grand old man of literature and traitor now almost 90 years old, on his personal journey through criminal proceedings against him after the war, from the period of house arrest at Nørholm, the stay at Grimstad Hospital and finally to the Old People's Home in Landvik. Hamsun goes for walks in the countryside, recounts short stories, commits memories from his youth to writing... and waits. He waits for his case to come before the court. He waits for an opportunity to explain himself. He waits for his final sentence. All the while bitterly continuing to adhere to his psychiatric degradation and his status as a social pariah and political exile.

In Hamsun's speech to the court in Grimstad, incorporated in its entirety in *On Overgrown Paths*, he repeats time and time again that he does not wish to come with excuses or a defence, but simply to explain himself. He stands by the articles he wrote during the war. As he always has done. Perhaps it is this which makes the strongest impression when reading *On Overgrown Paths* today; this outstanding writer of prose rigidly and obstinately continues to proclaim his responsibility in a manner the world no longer is able to hear.

Trond Haugen

Research Librarian, The National Library of Norway (Nasjonalbiblioteket)

Musical Resistance

Harald Sæverud's rage and hatred of the Occupying Forces in Norway during World War II struck him with a shot of inspiration: the « *Ballad of Revolt* » (« Kjempeviseslått») came to him whilst he was standing on a ferry landing at the head of the Sognefjord in 1942. The composition became Sæverud's contribution to the Norwegian resistance movement; he dedicated it to the countless fighters on the Home Front, large and small. This powerful, vigorous piece of music will be used in the commemorative performance of «On Overgrown Paths» as a background commentary to Knut Hamsun's own words – the lyrical, autobiographical reminiscences and the seductive defence speeches in the documentary novel *On Overgrown Paths* (1949). The flood of monologues in the book is thus countered and confronted by the music, leading to a contextual dialogue of conflicting opinions.

Harald Sigurd Johan Sæverud (1897–1992), a Norwegian, neoclassical composer. Sæverud's music is characterised by national tonality, vitality, strongly marked rhythm and the heritage of Norwegian folk music.

Drama in Granite

As early as the 1930s Hitler had begun planning a gigantic triumphal monument in Nuremberg to celebrate the expansion and conquests of the Third Reich. The plan included building a monumental stadium in the Zeppelin field with a capacity of 400 000 spectators. Adolf Hitler put Defence Minister and architect Albert Speer in charge of the plans. Based on his theories of «Ruin Value » and the impermanence of concrete, Speer (with Hitler's approval) chose granite as the main building material for his plans. The granite was to be obtained from the whole of the Greater German Reich.

During the Occupation of Norway (from 1940) Norwegian granite was also requisitioned for use in Nuremberg, including granite from the Fjære area. The beautiful Fjære granite had been commercially exploited in several small quarries as early as the 1870s. Examples of Fjære granite include ornamentation in the Trinity Church (Trefoldighetskirken) in Arendal and the characteristic church with twin towers in Skien. Granite had also been exported prior to Hitler's megalomaniac plans, including to the city of Hamburg where it had been used in a bank building.

A large quantity of granite blocks gradually started building up in Grimstad harbour ready for shipment to Germany. The Fjære granite never got that far, however. When peace was declared in 1945 the consignment of stone was taken over by the Enemy Property Directorate (Direktoratet for fiendtlig eiendom) and the «Hitler stone» was later used for terracing and road-building.

From quarry to open-air theatre

Nuremberg never did acquire a 400 000 seat stadium. But in 1993 Bentein Baardson and others launched the visionary idea of building a spectacular outdoor stage in the Fjæreheia quarry. Baardsson and Agder Theatre have had the pleasure of seeing their dreams being realized – in concrete and some aspen wood (!), with a seating capacity of close to 1000.

Fjæreheia has contributed to consolidating Grimstad's position as the "Town of Poets". The 1993 inaugural production on the outdoor stage was the Ibsen play «Catilina». Since then there have been performances of a number of Ibsen plays and now in the Hamsun Anniversary Year, a Hamsun performance as well. In July 2009 there was a performance of Baardson's «Flowers and Blood» (Blomster og blod») and on 18 September there will be a performance of «On Overgrown Paths», the last of the four national Hamsun commemorative events in 2009.

Hamsun 2009: Background and Organisation

The Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs (Kultur- og kirke departementet) wishes the anniversary of Knut Hamsun's birth to be commemorated in a manner commensurate with his standing as an internationally renowned author. The Ministry has given the National Library of Norway (Nasjonalbiblioteket) responsibility for organising the official commemorations in Norway in collaboration with academic experts, the Hamsun municipalities and other relevant organisations and individuals.

The National Library invited representatives of the Hamsun municipalities, research groups, the Hamsun Society (Hamsun-Selskapet) and others to take part in a Project Forum called *Hamsun 2009*. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has Observer Status in the Forum which is chaired by National Librarian Vigdis Moe Skarstein. The Secretariat is located at the National Library.

The National Library has set up a collaboration with the National Touring Theatre of Norway (Riksteatret). Together with *Hamsun 2009* they are arranging four national commemorative events in Oslo, Lom, Hamarøy and Grimstad. In accordance with a request from the National Library, each individual Hamsun municipality has established a Planning Committee for the Hamsun events taking place both locally and regionally.

Organisations and individuals involved

The 150th anniversary of the birth of Knut Hamsun will be celebrated over the whole of Norway. Norwegian schools, academic groups, organisations, municipalities, counties and other parties wishing to contribute to the dissemination of information about Hamsun's life and works will initiate and implement activities independently, as well as collaborate on a variety of events.

The Hamsun anniversary will also be celebrated abroad. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for international cultural collaboration and the promotion of Norway abroad. The aim of promoting Hamsun internationally in 2009 is to raise the profile of his writings, as well as to generate interest in Hamsun in a variety of cultural contexts in different parts of the world. An additional objective is to promote modern Norway as a nation presenting and renewing a significant part of its cultural heritage.

The 150th Anniversary of 2009 – Four National Commemorative Events:

19 February – Oslo: «Hunger and Soup»

Arrogant, starving, proud, delirious, furious, in love, hopeful and poor. The commemorative event marking the opening of the Hamsun Anniversary Year 2009 was held on 19 February. The programme included extracts, scenes, dialogues and monologues from Knut Hamsun's modernist break-through novel *Hunger* (*Sult*, 1890).

The audience followed Ylajali to St. Olavs plass and on the way experienced a hullabaloo on the steps of the National Gallery, song and music in Studenterlunden, rejections by newspapers, evictions from lodgings and houses, quarrels with police constables, bones with scraps of meat, attacks on God, boisterous conversations with street girls and soup kitchens everywhere. Director: Catrine Telle/The National Touring Company of Norway.

1 August – Lom/Vågå: «Oh Isak! Hamsun across Time»

In 1920 Knut Hamsun was awarded the Nobel Prize for his novel *The Growth of the Soil* (*Markens grøde*). The novel is perhaps Hamsun's most widely read, most loved and yet also most hated work. It has been called a national treasure, Hamsun's homage to nature and children of nature, but has also been highlighted as an example of Hamsun's reactionary views on women and society.

On 1 August about one hundred women dressed in yellow met on the mountainside of Sognefjellet, amongst them actresses Ane Dahl Torp, Liv Bernhoft Osa and Marit Østbye. Through the eyes of five prominent contemporary Norwegian authors, in the midst of the mountains, surrounded by choral works, crying children and city sounds, we met "The Growth of the Soil" (*Markens grøde*).

Herbjørg Wassmo, Gro Dahle, Maria Tryti Vennerød, Hanne Ørstavik and Vigdis Hjort were invited to come with their response to the Nobel Prize-winning novel from the perspective of women writing in 2009. The result – love, sarcasm and reflection. Director: Kjersti Horn/The National Touring Theatre of Norway

4 August – Hamarøy: « Nothing to Dread» – a Gala Performance

The 150th anniversary of the birth of Knut Hamsun was celebrated with the opening of the new Hamsun Centre at Hamarøy, the opening of the Hamsun Days and a stunning, action-packed performance with interpreters of Hamsun from the whole of Norway. August, Hamsun's eternal salesman from Wayfarers (*Landstrykere*) played by Per Kjerstad, united the disparate elements. Director: Catrine Telle/The National Touring Theatre of Norway.

18 September – Grimstad: «On Overgrown Paths»

An old man struggles along overgrown paths in the stone quarry of Fjæreheia. He is hard of hearing and almost blind, but the extraordinary power of his language is still intact. Do not miss this poetic and melodious production about Knut Hamsun and the stillness and solitude of old age.

A red ribbon-like graphic with the word "Hamsun" in white, and a gold ribbon-like graphic below it with the year "2009" in white. The gold ribbon has a dotted pattern at the bottom.

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“On Overgrown Paths” is the last of four national commemorative events marking the 150th anniversary of Knut Hamsun’s birth. The production is a collaboration between the Norwegian Touring Theatre and Agder Theatre, on behalf of the National Library of Norway. Director: Hilde Andersen. Actor: Lars Øyno.

For programme details, see hamsun.no

About the Website

The www.hamsun.no website is a central channel of communication for the Knut Hamsun Anniversary Year. Here one can find topical news and information about Hamsun events both at home and abroad. The “Ressurstorget” section on the website has an overview of lecturers, productions and other Hamsun-related resources, including three postcards with Hamsun motifs which may be downloaded. In addition, the website will provide information on Hamsun’s life and writings using materials from the National Library Collection (photographs, posters, manuscripts etc.), as well as information on research and new writing by contemporary authors.

The National Library is responsible for development and operation of the website (Editor: Gro Roksand). The site will continue to operate after the end of Anniversary Year.

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Knut Hamsun's life and works

- 1859 Knut Hamsun was born as Knud Pedersen on 4 August in the valley of Gudbrandsdalen.
- 1862 Moved with his family to the village of Hamsund, Hamarøy in the county of Nordland.
- 1877 His first book, *Den Gaadefulde*, was published in Tromsø by Mikal Urdals forlag.
- 1886 Moved to Kristiania in the winter. Experienced hunger and destitution. He travelled to the USA in August, his second visit. Had various jobs, including work as a tram conductor in Chicago.
- 1887 Travelled to Minneapolis in the spring. Worked as a journalist and lecturer.
- 1888 Turned 29 in August, but from then on consistently referred to himself as being one year younger. The first chapters of *Hunger (Sult)* were printed anonymously in November in the Copenhagen journal *Ny jord*.
- 1890 In June, *Hunger* was published in book form under Hamsun's full name. Moved to Lillesand on the south coast of Norway where he wrote the short story "Smaabyliv" and "Fra det ubevidste Sjæleliv", a literary manifesto.
- 1892 *Mysterier (Mysterier)* was published in September.
- 1894 *Pan* was published in December.
- 1898 Married Bergljot Goepfert (née Bech) on 13 May. *Aftenrøde* was published in June and received its world premiere at Christiania Theater on 17 October (11 performances). *Victoria* was published in October.
- 1909 Hamsun married Marie Lavik on 25 June. *A Wanderer plays on Muted Strings (En vandrer spiller med Sordin)* was published in November/December.
- 1911 *In the Grip of Life* was published in book form in January. Bought "Skogheim", a farm belonging to the local policeman at Hamarøy. Settled there as a writer and farmer together with Marie after the house had been renovated.
- 1917 Sold the "Skogheim" farm at Hamarøy and moved to Larvik. *The Growth of the Soil* was published.
- 1918 The Hamsun family moved to Nørholm near Grimstad.
- 1920 *The Women at the Pump (Konerne ved Vandposten)* was published. Received the Nobel Prize in Stockholm on 10 December for the novel *The Growth of the Soil*.
- 1927 Moved back to Nørholm. *Wayfarers* was published in October.
- 1935 Attacked the imprisoned German pacifist and later Nobel Laureate Carl von Ossietzky in an article entitled "Ossietzky" which appeared in *Aftenposten* and *Tidens Tegn* on 22 November.
- 1940 Norway was invaded by German troops on 9 April. Hamsun wrote the article "Et Ord til os" at the outbreak of the war, as well as a number of other articles and appeals in support of the occupying forces.

- 1943 Hamsun sent his Nobel Prize Medal to Goebbels in June. Had a tempestuous meeting with Hitler in Berchtesgaden on 26 June, at which Hamsun put forward complaints about Terboven, the German Reichskommissar in Norway.
- 1945 Wrote an obituary for Adolf Hitler which appeared in *Aftenposten* on 7 May. After German armed forces had withdrawn from Norway, Knut and Marie Hamsun were held under house arrest at Nørholm. Later Hamsun was interned at Grimstad Hospital. Appeared before Sand Magistrate's Court in Grimstad on 23 June charged with Crimes against the State under § 86 and 140 of the Penal Code. Later transferred to the Psychiatric Clinic at Vinderen in Oslo where he was examined by Consultant Gabriel Langfeldt. Hamsun made notes for *On Overgrown Paths (Paa gjengrodde Stier)*.
- 1946 Discharged from the Psychiatric Clinic after a harrowing stay. The psychiatric assessment concluded that Hamsun was of sound mind under the provisions of criminal law although his mental faculties were considered to be permanently impaired.
- 1947 Following the medico-legal psychiatric assessment the Director General of Public Prosecutions chose not to initiate criminal proceedings against Hamsun. The issue of whether he should be made financially accountable for his membership in Nasjonal Samling (NS) was passed to the Directorate for Compensation (Erstatningsdirektoratet). Legal proceedings in the compensation case took place at Sand Magistrate's Court in Grimstad on 16 December. Sentenced to pay NOK 425 000 as compensation for his NS membership. The sentence was passed on 19 December. In June 1948 the Supreme Court reduced the level of compensation to NOK 325 000.
- 1949– *On Overgrown Paths* was published on 28 September 1949. Lived a quiet life at
1952 Nørholm. Minimal sight and hearing.
- 1952 Knut Hamsun died in his bedroom at Nørholm on 19 February. He was buried at Nørholm.

More about Hamsun's life and works:

http://www.nb.no/hamsun2009/hamsuns_liv_og_verk

Hamsun's Calendar Pages

by Sigbjørn Grindheim, Research Librarian, the National Library

“I have always been in the habit of scribbling things down at night after a couple of hours' sleep, it's neither flesh nor fowl in the morning, just loose notes, I have no other drafts,” Hamsun wrote to his publisher Harald Grieg.

Hamsun wrote notes on both sides of used calendar pages. **Hamsun 2009** has incorporated these as a design element in the 150th Anniversary Celebrations, and they will feature on the banners along Karl Johans gate during the opening commemorative event in Oslo on 19 February. The originals will be put on display at the National Library from the same date.

When Knut Hamsun wrote notes, he used any paper to hand. The unused reverse side of a sheet which had already been written on would serve, whatever was on the front. It might be one of his own manuscript sheets, letters or envelopes he had received, bills or both sides of used calendar pages. It was not unusual to use the latter, especially, as they had served their purpose. Writing paper was a scarce commodity in many homes in the 1800s and economizing on paper was not uncommon. Even today, for many people, not wasting paper is still a reflex action.

If the letters were in quarto format, Hamsun would tear them in two down the middle so that he had writing sheets in octavo format. The book manuscripts in the National Library are mostly in this format; the manuscript of *Rosa* has manuscripts of articles and letters on the reverse, for example. Parts of the *Siste Kapitel* were written on calendar pages, as was the draft of an article about Strindberg for his birthday in 1912, as well as notes and drafts of *August*. In the letter to his publisher Harald Grieg* mentioned above, Knut Hamsun writes about the manuscript of *The Ring is Closed*: “So you see I don't have a draft, so thank goodness you have a fireproof hole somewhere for the Mscpt.**”

Originals will be on display 19 February–6 June in the National Library

The calendar pages with Hamsun's notes were part of Jonas Skougaard's bequest to the University Library in 1968. This collection is now housed in the National Library. In the Jubilee Exhibition at the National Library, *k e n n e t a a – Knut Hamsun's Early Writings*, further examples may be seen of the scraps of paper on which Hamsun made notes, including the calendar page in the illustration above. The exhibition opens on 19 February (opening to the general public from 4 p.m.) and lasts until 6 June.

*The letter to the publisher Harald Grieg 23 May 1936 is reproduced in *Knut Hamsun som han var, Et utvalg av hans brev* by Tore Hamsun, Oslo 1956, p. 94-95, and subsequently in *Knut Hamsuns brev* by Harald S. Næss, but the owner of the original is unknown.

** Mscpt=manuscript

