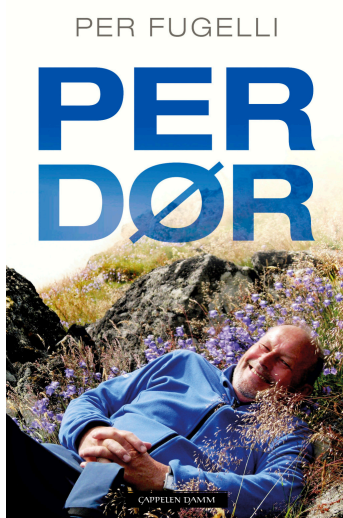

An insightful pathography

BOOK REVIEW

LINDA NESBY

Associate professor, Department of Language and Culture
University of Tromsø – the Arctic University of Norway



Per Fugelli

Per dør [Per is dying]

246 pages. Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2017. Price NOK 379

ISBN 978-82-02-55991-5

Autobiographical narratives of disease, or pathographies, are a growing genre. Pathographies about cancer are especially widespread, and the Oria library database shows that in the period from 1977 to 2015, altogether 39 autobiographical books on the subject of cancer were published in Norwegian. The earliest example is *Blå søndag, rød mandag. Å leve med kreft* [Blue Sunday, red Monday. Living with cancer] by Berit Eriksen from 1977. The genre gained a general readership with Gunhild Corwin's *Idas dans* [Ida's dance] from 2005, four editions of which have been published until now. 2010

saw the publication of *Regines bok: En ung jentes siste ord* [*Regine's book: A young girl's last words*], based on the blog of 18-year-old Regine Stokke, who died of cancer in 2009. The book became a bestseller and has been translated into several languages.

It is no coincidence that two of the best-known books of this genre in Norwegian deal with tragic courses of disease in young people. We follow the stories of teenagers, who from one day to the next are brutally torn from a healthy existence to a condition of life-threatening illness. The narratives are reminiscent of the diary genre, and follow the patient closely up to the point of death. Per Fugelli's *Per dør* also presents an example of a pathography with a great degree of intimacy between the narrator and his story, and a short time lapse between the time of narration and the narrator's death.

The modern pathography is a layman's phenomenon. As a doctor, professor, author and patient, however, Per Fugelli brings to the genre a level of reflection that makes the book particularly worth reading. Fugelli intersperses his personal story with theoretical reflections. He pays greater attention to the phase of dying and raises its status by claiming that it has unique qualities: 'I believe that we would do well to regard serious illness and impending death as a powerful life event, not merely as diagnosis and autopsy' (p. 74). This distinction demonstrates how illness and death also implicate experiences that are not of a physiological nature. Human experience is particularly valuable in cases where the illness is chronic or terminal.

Per dør is a multifaceted text. The title connotes Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* from 1867, but in contrast to Ibsen's Peer, who keeps reality at bay through make-believe at his mother Åse's deathbed, Per Fugelli addresses the topic of his own death with courage and honesty. At the same time, the use of the professor's and patient's first name is a play upon Per's role as a national emblem of health. *Per dør* raises and expands a personal story of illness to encompass insights on patient treatment and the life of, and with, a dying person. With this modern, secular 'Ars moriendi', Fugelli wishes to '[...] help those who are ill and their relatives to better endure death' (p. 82). In this way, *Per dør* earns the distinction of being one of the most insightful Norwegian pathographies in recent years.

Publisert: 12 December 2017. Tidsskr Nor Legeforen. DOI: 10.4045/tidsskr.17.0857

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