

THE CITY OF OSLO IN JAN ERIK VOLD'S POEMS

RALUCA-DANIELA DUINEA¹

ABSTRACT. *The City of Oslo in Jan Erik Vold's Poems.* The aim of this paper is to examine, from a cultural and social perspective, the Norwegian urban areas and everyday situations in Jan Erik Vold's (b. 1939) poems. Our close-reading technique reveals important social aspects, different places and streets, located in the capital city of Norway, Oslo. These urban poems written by the contemporary Norwegian poet Jan Erik Vold contribute to the reconstruction of a new Norwegian cultural identity as it is reflected in a selection of poems taken from *Mor Godhjertas glade versjon. Ja* (*Mother Goodhearted's Happy Version. Yes*, 1968), followed by the poet's wanderings in the city of Oslo in *En som het Abel Ek* (*One Named Abel Ek*, 1988), and concluding with his bitter social criticism in *Elg* (*Moose*, 1989) and *IKKE. Skillingstrykk fra nittitallet* (*Not: Broadsides from the Nineties*, 1993). Vold's urban poems emphasise the transition from *nyenkle* (*new simple*), friendly and descriptive poems which present closely the city of Oslo on foot, to short, political and social critical poems from the 90s. Thus, it is of great importance to traverse various urban 'landscapes' in different periods of time, beginning with the 1960s, followed by the 80s and the 90s.

Keywords: *Jan Erik Vold, urban poems, social criticism, Norwegian urban areas, the city of Oslo*

REZUMAT. *Oraşul Oslo în poeziile lui Jan Erik Vold.* Această lucrare are ca scop o analiză, din perspectivă culturală și socială, a zonelor urbane și a situațiilor cotidiene din oraşul Oslo, așa cum sunt ele prezentate în poemele lui Jan Erik Vold (n. 1939). Tehnica *close-reading*-ului folosită pentru a analiza acest tip de poezie urbană dezvăluie aspecte sociale importante, precum și diferite locuri și străzi din capitala Norvegiei, Oslo. Aceste poezii urbane scrise de poetul contemporan norvegian Jan Erik Vold contribuie la reconstrucția unei noi identități culturale norvegiene, așa cum este reflectată în poeziile selectate din volumul *Versiunea*

¹ **Raluca-Daniela DUINEA** is Senior Lecturer, PhD of Norwegian at the Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literature, Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Letters, Cluj-Napoca. She has published a series of articles on Norwegian contemporary poetry and the book entitled *The Poetry of Jan Erik Vold and the Norwegian Lyric Modernism in the 1960s*. She is currently working on a bilingual (Norwegian-Romanian) anthology of several selected poems of Jan Erik Vold. E-mail: raluca_daniela_radut@yahoo.com.

fericită a mamei Inimă Bună. Da, 1968, urmate de plimbările poetului prin orașul Oslo, în volumul intitulat *Așa-Numitul Abel Ek*, 1988. Ciclul de poezii urbane se încheie cu o serie de poeme cu tenta politică, criticând aspru societatea norvegiană așa cum apar în volumele intitulate *Elan*, 1989 și *Nu: Calomniile din anii nouăzeci*, 1993. Poeziile urbane ale lui Jan Erik Vold marchează trecerea de la poeziile de tip *nyenkle* (*neo-simpliste*), deschise și descriptive, care prezintă îndeaproape orașul Oslo la pas, la poeziile critice, cu tentă politică și socială din anii '90. Astfel, cititorul parcurge diverse 'peisaje' urbane în diferite perioade de timp, începând cu anii '60, urmate de anii '80, și culminând cu anii '90.

Cuvinte-cheie: *Jan Erik Vold, poezii urbane, critica socială, zone urbane norvegiane, orașul Oslo*

Jan Erik Vold has been an important member of the Literary Circle and magazine *Profil*, awarded with the Dobloug Prize in 1988, the Brage Prize in 1997, Gyldendal Prize in 2000, The Norwegian Writers' Center's *Wergelands Åre Prize*² in 2008 and in 2018 he was awarded *Det Norske Akademis Pris til minne om Thorleif Dahl* (*The Norwegian Academy Prize in Memory of Thorleif Dahl*). He was also one of the most prominent Norwegian poets of his generation, who in the second part of the 1960s, used for the first time in Norwegian poetry, the concepts of *nyenkelhet* (*new simplicity*) and *konkretisme* (*concretism*) through his experimental poems published in the volumes: *mellom speil og speil* (*Between Mirror and Mirror*, 1965), *blikket* (*The Gaze*, 1966), *HEKT* (*Grab*, 1966) and *kykelipi*, 1969. With these poems he emphasised that words can be easily given a particular form and shape by using wordplay and a bit of poetical imagination. The concept of *nyenkelheten* (*new simplicity*)³ was illustrated by his best-selling collection of poems, *Mor Godhjertas glade versjon. Ja* (*Mother Goodhearted's Happy Version. Yes*, 1968), which consists of a great number of urban poems about the city of Oslo with its streets, the place where the poet was born, the Blue Tram, the Bislett Sports Stadium, his friends and his neighbourhood. Vold is a lyrical master in shaping the map of Oslo by using long expansive and *nyenkle* (*new simple*) poems. In 1992 he was given the honorary prize - *Bypatrioten* (*The City Patriot*), awarded by Olso's Byens Vel (*The Society for the Welfare of Oslo*).

² "“This prize is established by The Norwegian Writers' Center and is awarded to a person or institution that has made noticeable efforts in the process of dissemination of poetry” - <https://www.forfattersentrum.no/ostlandet/wergelands/> (accessed 03.12.2020).

³ *Nyenkelheten* (*the new simplicity*) is a literary concept which makes reference to simple and common poems, most of them being about everyday life, things and activities.

Based on simple and concrete things and even real people and facts, the urban poems offer the reader an interesting combination of present and past images of the city of Oslo as it was before, during and after the most expected but also dangerous process of modernization. Thus, "Funny", "Trikkeskinne-diktet" ("Tramlines"), "Bildet stanser på Barkåker-diktet" ("The Image Stops at Barkåker-The Poem"), "Tale for loffen" ("Speech for the White Bread"), "Bo på Briskeby blues" ("Living in Briskeby Blues") are a few examples of poems published in the volume *Mor Godhjertas glade versjon. Ja* (*Mother Goodhearted's Happy Version. Yes*, 1968), which illustrate the city life, approached from various poetical perspectives and interpretations. Being born in Oslo, the poet focuses his attention both on its geographical location, including streets, and houses, and on people's everyday life and preoccupations. Being particularly interested in presenting its social part, Vold often wrote about political and social issues of the city, getting actively involved in different social and political debates of that time. For instance, the poem entitled "Desemberlys – stumfilm i Wergelandsveien" ("December Light – Silent Film in Wergeland Street") is made of twenty-five lines without being structured in stanzas and without any punctuation marks but commas and a few dashes which underlines the pauses the poet makes while reading it. The whole poem is built on several contrasts. It begins with "-denne kvinnen" ("-this woman") repeated three times throughout the poem, thus outlining the main character who is "a woman" with her baby boy sleeping in a pram while she was talking to the poet on the pavement on a clear December morning ("en klar desembermorgen"). The eleventh line reveals the reader the place where this moment took place. It was on the pavement along the Wergelandsveien (Wergeland Street) near Slottsparken (The Palace Park) in Oslo. While the woman was talking, the poet could not focus enough as to be able to follow her, this being caused also by the rumour and the city noise "I cannot follow/ her, there are partly the cars passing along Wergeland Street, partly/ her clean maiden face, so strong and clear in the morning light [...]" (Vold, *Mother Goodhearted* 83, my own translation)⁴. The only thing the poet remembered was that the woman's husband "is at the monastery/ somewhere in Belgium, to concentrate himself/ on a research assignment [...]" (Vold, *Mother Goodhearted* 83, my own translation)⁵. The tone of the poem is ironical in the sense that there are several words, such as: "pavement", "car noise", "I cannot follow her [because of the noise]" contrasting with "monastery", "to concentrate". In other words, the stress is set on the contrast noise vs. quietness, where noise can also be associated with air and phonic pollution. The use of this location is

⁴ "jeg er ikke riktig/ med, dels suser bilene forbi langs Wergelandsveien, dels/ er hennes rene pikeansikt så sterkt og klart mot morgenlyset, [...]"

⁵ "er i kloster/ i Belgia et sted, for å konsentrere seg/ om en forskeroppgave, [...]"

not chosen at random, on the contrary, Wergeland Street separates the Palace Park from an urban area, with numerous houses, block of flats and newly built buildings. Vold is presenting the city of Oslo using two main perspectives: Oslo the green and old city and Oslo in its full process of modernisation.

By comparing it to the poem above, "En dag vender byen tilbake" ("One Day the City Will Come Back") begins with a nostalgic tone, though some may also discern a touch of regret and bitter irony strongly related to the way in which Oslo gradually became a modern city. The poem is structured in seven stanzas made of two long lines. It begins with the image created by the epithet the 'smoke clouds' coming out of the people's mouth and the personification of these clouds with "big vivid colourless flowers" (Vold, *Mother Goodhearted* 74, my own translation)⁶. The clouds of smoke bring back a childhood memory which is revealed through the rhetorical question: "[...] Who/ didn't play steam train in November when he was little?" (Vold, *Mother Goodhearted* 74, my own translation)⁷. In search of a peaceful place, Vold personifies the tram, by stating that it is "[...] a big blue animal that never gets tired/ of playing with us" (74, my own translation)⁸, followed by the comparison "the sky is blue like a tram [...]" (74, my own translation)⁹. According to Vold, life is seen as a game, which gradually becomes something serious. In this sense, there is an abrupt change in the tone of the poem, becoming suddenly ironic and bitter. The line "[...] where the frost/ with urine has drawn up the strangest bends/ from the fence to the pavement" (74, my own translation)¹⁰ illustrates the reality where "[...] The street is the land of the cobblestones, / swarming with cobblestones, one by one and one by one, each stone / stabbed in its own place by men in blue overalls, stabbed / and stabbed to an endless bouquet of gray flowers to us!" (75, my own translation)¹¹. Thus, the poet gives human characteristics to the cobblestones which were 'killed' by the workers in blue overall, by replacing them with asphalt. The verb "å stikke noen ned" means "to stab somebody", so this image presents the process of 'killing' the historical past of the city of Oslo whose streets are undergoing renovation, thus burying its historical and cultural beauties. This verb "å stikke ned" creates an ambiguous sense to the entire stanza. On the one hand, it creates the image of the workers who are

⁶ "røykskyer/ ut av munnen, store levende fargeløse blomster".

⁷ "[...] Hvem/ har ikke lekt damp tog i november da han var liten?"

⁸ "[...] et stort blått dyr som aldri blir trett/ av å leke med oss".

⁹ "Himmelen er blå som en slik trikk [...]".

¹⁰ "[...] der frosten/ med urin har trukket opp de underligste buktninger/ fra plankegerde til fortauskant".

¹¹ "[...] Gata er brosteinens land, /der myldrer det av brostein, en og en og en og en, hver stein/ stukket ned på sin plass av menn i blå overall, stukket ned/ og stukket ned til en endeløs bukett grå blomster til oss!"

pressing so hard the cobblestones in order to break them into pieces. On the other hand, the poet uses this image in order to emphasise that it is possible for the city of Oslo to become what it was once, by referring to its beautiful and archaic cobblestone streets which are paved by the workers. In fact, these pieces of stones resemble the pieces of a puzzle which are fixed into the street by the workers in order to recreate the original image of the city of Oslo.

The whole poem is built on the following words: 'folk' ('people'), 'blomster' ('flowers'), 'trikk' ('tram'), 'himlen' ('sky'), 'fortau' ('pavement'), 'gate' ('street'), 'brostein' ('cobblestones') and 'menn i blå overall' ('men in blue overalls'). These are the words on which the entire poem is structured on, being critical of the huge wave of modernisation process upon the old and precious cultural heritage of the city, including streets, wooden houses and green areas, a process seen only as a way of destruction and pollution.

Most of the poems from *Mor Godhjerta* (*Mother Goodhearted*) are about the city of Oslo, being often characterised as sharp, ironic and critical against the Norwegian public authorities.

From this perspective, the cityscapes can remind of Rolf Jacobsen. The green colour of the book cover may symbolise spring – but also green values, an endangered life style, for everything is not only idyllic, many of the poems consist of a harsh criticism towards the authorities of the city of Oslo, of the social politics and the housing politics, of the reorganization and the lack of respect for old housing areas [of Oslo] (*Wærp, Nordlit* 9 105, my own translation).¹²

The collection entitled *En som het Abel Ek* (*One Named Abel Ek, 1988*) consists, right from its title, of a wordplay which has different meanings: “en som het” (“one named”) or “ensomhet” (“loneliness”). The poems from this volume are mostly centred on nature, on the feelings of happiness and solitude of the main character, Abel Ek. Thus, the city of Oslo is seen and described from a totally different perspective than those presented in the aforementioned poems: “the main character is Abel, maybe the poet’s alter ego, [...], who is strolling around Oslo, by ‘bringing the whole city in’, its present and its past, being excited – by the Blue Tram – and irritated – by the cutting down of the old trees” (*Wærp, Nordlit* 9 118, my own translation)¹³. For instance, “På Vippetangen”

¹² “Byskildringene kan mine om Rolf Jacobsen i det lyse hjørnet. Den grønne omslagsfargen kan i så måte symbolisere våren – men også grønne verdier, en truet livsstil, for alt er ikke bare idyll, mange av diktene formulerer en krass kritikk av styringen av Oslo by, av sosialpolitikken og boligpolitikken, av saneringsiver og mangel på respekt overfor gamle boligområder”.

¹³ “hovedpersonen er Abel, kanskje et alter ego for poeten, [...], som rusler rundt i Oslo og “tar inn” hele byen, i nåtid og fortid, lar seg beruse – av blåtrikken – og irritere – av nedhoggingen av gamle trær”.

("At Vippetangen¹⁴") is a poem of five stanzas, each made of four lines which resembles a *nyenkel* (*new simple*) poem about a man who is taking a relaxing walk to the harbour before taking the bus to the north. This poem is part of the "Sixth book" from the above-mentioned volume, called "Vi er her, Abel Ek!" ("We are here, Abel Ek").

Most of the lines are only made of a single word which is either a preposition or an article. The poem presents a part of Oslo Fjord City including Vippetangen area. The following words selected from the poem, 'havna' ('harbour'), 'å vagge på' ('to sway from side to side'), 'Vippetangen', 'fjorden' ('the fjord') and 'water' present the southern part of the city with its coastline. Underneath this simple poem, the text hints at a more complex idea which puts emphasis on the ironic aspects of the poetic voice regarding the complex process of urban development of the waterfront of the Fjord City in Oslo. The poetic voice was against this renewal project, his disagreement being subtly presented among the lines of this poem: "[...]/ take a walk/ down to the harbour/ [...]/to check/ if/ the fjord/ is in water/, [...]" (Vold, *One Named Abel Ek* 193, my own translation)¹⁵. According to Professor Henning Howlid Wærp, the city of Oslo as it is presented in some of the poems of this volume is depicted from an ironic and critical perspective, the poetic voice being almost all the time bothered by all the changes that occurred gradually in town, especially those related to the process of modernisation: "[...] a lyric *I* who potters about in Oslo, [...], in the present and in the past, being exhilarated - by the Blue Tram - and annoyed about cutting down the old trees" (Wærp, *Nordlit* 9 118, my own translation)¹⁶.

"Linje Null" ("The End of the Line") is a poem selected from the same volume, *En som het Abel Ek* (*One Named Abel Ek*, 1988), whose title can be translated in two different ways, either "Line Zero" thinking of one of the trams' lines, which reveals the irony and sarcasm in the tone of the poetic voice, or "The End of the Line" if the reader refers strictly to its themes, including death, abandonment, urbanization. Even if the poem is arranged in three stanzas each of four verses, it is made of five sentences and a rhetorical question which are separated randomly into different lines, thus having the shape of a poem. The first visual image presents the Frelseren's graveyard in the beginning of spring, with pots ("kanner") and crosses ("kors") and the fresh painted bench ("benken er nymalt"). In the background one could see the rust-red bus to Sagene which is one of the boroughs of Oslo whose name means 'saws' in English and which

¹⁴ "Vippetangen is the city's most central harbour situated at about one kilometre from The City Hall and Oslo Central Station, an area which is part of the Fjord City" -

<https://www.oslohavn.no/no/arkiv/arkiv-2011/vippetangen/>, accessed 12.12.2020.

¹⁵ "[...]/ ta en tur/ ned til havna/ [...]/sjekke / om/ fjorden/ ligger i water/, [...]"

¹⁶ "[...] et jeg som rusler rundt i Oslo, [...], i nåtid og fortid, lar seg beruse - av blåtrikken- og irritere- av nedhoggingen av gamle trær".

emphasis the idea that this part of the city was strongly industrialised, especially in the 19th century¹⁷. The chromatic image of the rust-coloured bus as it is presented in the following verses: “Back in time/ there was Sagene/ tram – [...]” (“Før i tiden/ fantes Sagene/trikken – [...]”) (Vold, *One Named Abel Ek* 116, my own translation), creates a crossing bridge between the city of Oslo as it was in the times past and nowadays. Moreover, the fact that the poetic voice points out, that once, in this borough, the Sagene Line was the first tramway opened in 1899, now being abandoned.¹⁸ “[...] Sagene/ tram – it was light blue and wandered/ in circle. Line Zero” (“[...] Sagene/ trikken – den var lyseblå og vandret/ i ring. Linje Null”) (Vold, *One Named Abel Ek* 116, my own translation).

In 1989 Vold published the volume entitled *Elg (Moose)*, which is formed by different poems which offer several perspectives about Norwegian culture and society, aiming at different places and experiences in the city of Oslo. The title of the volume is the name of the largest land mammal in Norway, the moose. In this sense, in the beginning of the volume, there is a poem entitled *Elg (Moose)* where the poetic voice invites the reader to call him a moose, by associating his personality with the characteristics of a moose, thinking about the patience, the endurance and the strength of this animal. However, the poetic voice states that like the moose, he “sparker hardt/ men sjelden./ Bare/ når/ nødvendig” (“kicks hard/ but rarely./ Only/ when/ necessary” (Vold, *Moose* 15, my own translation). Therefore, the reader is aware, right from the beginning that according to the poetic voice there is a strong resemblance between a Norwegian and a moose, especially regarding their behaviour in different situations. On the one hand, among the poems from this volume, the one entitled “Enn om vi asfalterte flagget?” (“What if we paved the flag with asphalt?”) is a deeply sarcastic dedication “to those who destroyed the capital city of this country” (Vold, *Moose* 114, my own translation). On the other hand, poems like “Kapitalismens grunnleggende mystikk” (“The Fundamental Mysticism of the Capitalism” and “Sangen om Bislett – Skøytesportens Mekka” (“The Song about Bislett – The Mekka of Ice Skating”) are strongly related to several administrative, internal city issues, whereas there are poems dedicated to various Norwegian personalities, sportsmen and literary figures all being gathered both in the subchapter *Fem viser (Five Folk Songs)* and *In Memory of*. The poem “Applaus for Rolf Falk-Larssen (A Round of Applause for Rolf Falk-Lars”) published in *Fem viser (Five Folk Songs)* presented a well-known sportsman, Rolf Falk-Larssen (b. 1960), who became a World Champion at skating in 1983 on Bislett Stadium, in Oslo. The subchapter *In Memory of* consists of several poems dedicated to different Norwegian literary figures: “Den svimle svingen – Inger Hagerup (1905-1985)” (“The Dizzy Swing - Inger Hagerup (1905-1985), Inger

¹⁷ [https://www.oslobyleksikon.no/side/Sagene_\(bydel\)](https://www.oslobyleksikon.no/side/Sagene_(bydel)), accessed 12.12.2020.

¹⁸ https://www.oslobyleksikon.no/side/Sagene_Ring, accessed 12.12.2020.

Hagerup being a Norwegian writer and poet who was born in Bergen, but after she got married in 1931, her family lived in Haugerud and area situated in the borough of Alna, Oslo. “Der bjørketreet stod – Radka Toneff (1952-1982)” (“Where the Birch Tree is Located – Radka Toneff (1952-1982)”, where Radka Toneff was a talented Norwegian-Bulgarian jazz musician, who was born in Oslo. There are also poems where different Norwegian poets and even foreign jazz musician are evoked, such as: the modernist post-war Norwegian poet Astrid Hjertenæs Andersen (1915-1985), the famous Norwegian romantic poet, Henrik Wergeland (1808-1845) and last but not least the American jazz trumpeter and vocalist, Chet Baker (1929-1988) who performed together with Vold on the album “Blåmann, Blåmann” (“Telemark Blue”) in 2009.

Thus, besides being an excellent poet, essayist and translator, Vold often reads his poems being accompanied by a blues or jazz orchestra, together with well-known Norwegian and foreign musicians. For instance, the poem “Sofies Plass Blues” (“Sophia’s Plass/Square – Blues”) published in the same volume in the subchapter entitled *Fem viser (Five Folk Songs)* is read by Vold together with Nisse Sandström (b. 1942), the Swedish jazz musician who played the tenor saxophone, the Norwegian jazz musicians, the pianist Egil Kapstad (1940-2017) and the upright bass, Terje Venaas (b. 1947). This performing together with several others was released on the album *Pytt Pytt Blues – Jazz&Lyrikk Kvartett (Pytt Pytt Blues – Jazz and the Lyrical Quartet)* in 1992.

The message of the poem “Sofies Plass Blues” (“Sophia’s Plass/Square – Blues”) is a more general one and it makes reference especially to those old and picturesque cobblestone streets which nowadays are full of value and are part of the cultural heritage of the city. These areas make a difference between the ultra-modern cities and the traditional and special places which are representative landmarks within a metropolis. The poem opens with the repetition of the word “stein” which means “stone” and with an enumeration and a summing up made by the poetic voice regarding the stones which were knocked down in order to be replaced with some other modern and more sustainable materials: “First, you grab a stone, then another one,/ Then you grab one more stone – on the whole, four stones/[...]/Than you grab seven stones and a deep breath:/squeeze them and knock down the stones” (Vold, *Moose* 61, my own translation)¹⁹. Right from the beginning the poetic voice seems to be highly preoccupied by numbers and counting, ‘fir’ (‘four’), ‘sju’ (‘seven’), ‘fjorten’ (‘fourteen’) and ‘ni’ (‘nine’) are those numbers mentioned by the lyric *I* throughout the whole poem. In the second stanza, the lexical field of the word ‘stone’ is enriched with the word ‘brostein’ (‘paving stones’ or ‘cobblestones’). In addition, there are two lines which make a clear reference to those days when almost all the streets were

¹⁹ “Først tar du en stein, så tar du en stein,/ Så tar du en stein og en til – det blir fir’/[...]/ Da har du sju stein, da tar du en djup pust:/ Klemmer til og dunker steinene ned”.

paved with cobblestones where even the “bryggergampen finner fotfeste i” (“the Jutland horse managed to get a foothold”). The poetic voice in the last two verses of the second stanza, describe Queen Sophia of Nassau (1836-1913) who was Queen of Sweden between 1872 and 1907 and Queen of Norway from 1872 until 1905. She was married to King Oscar II in 1857, being a religious and a philanthropist queen.²⁰ “Sophia was a queen. Sophia was a fairy./ Sophia received her place with the cobblestone in the snow” (61, my own translation)²¹. The tone of the lyric *I* is ironic and emphasises the fact that all the cobblestones would be gradually knocked down and be replaced with asphalt: “Remove the cobblestones, replace them with asphalt,/now, people who knock the cobblestones don’t count./ Nobody can count to seven, nobody can count to nine./ The one who does not like her place is Sophia!” (62, my own translation)²². The people who replaced the cobblestones with the asphalt did not care about the importance of each cobblestone for the city of Oslo, and as the poetic voice pointed out, ‘[they] don’t count now’. They were thinking very pragmatically about quickly replacing these stones with something more practical, repaving the old streets with asphalt. Additionally, there is also a wordplay regarding the verb ‘å telle’ [‘to count’] in the above mentioned lines: “folk, [...], teller ikke nå”, where the verb ‘å telle ikke’ means ‘doesn’t count’, while in the next line the verb ‘å telle’ is used properly with the meaning of ‘counting’ from one to ten, for instance. With reference to Sophia’s Plass, in the end of the poem, this place is personified, instead of talking about a place in Oslo, the poetic voice referred to it as Queen Sophia. Moreover, by using the verb “digger”, a slang word for ‘to like’ or ‘to set the emphasis on something’, it is expressed in an informal way the fact that the queen disliked this situation and would rather prefer the cobblestones to asphalt.

Regarding the structure of the poem, it is made of four stanzas, each made of six lines and a few para-rhymes: ‘stein’/‘fir’, ‘stein’/‘til’, ‘fe’/‘sne’, ‘rår’/‘flår’ and ‘nå’/‘ni’. This poem is also read rhythmically by Vold with a melody composed by one of the most famous Norwegian jazz musician Egil Kapstad. Thus, by reading it with a piano accompaniment, the message of the poem is not as ironic and bitter about this unpleasant urban experience, as it is reflected in the text itself. By setting it to music, the message gradually turned into a slightly humoristic and pleasant one, the piano expressing in a concrete way the sound and rhythm of knocking down the cobblestones. All the poems collected in this volume stress “[...], Vold’s implication [...]” (Wærp, *Nordlit* 9 119, my own translation)²³ and awareness.

²⁰ https://snl.no/Sofie_-_norsk_og_svensk_dronning, accessed 12.12.2020.

²¹ “Sofie var en dronning. Sofie var en fe./Sofie har fått sin plass med brostein i sne”.

²² “Brostein skal vekk, asfalt skal på,/folk som dunka brostein teller ikke nå./Ingen kan telle til sju, ingen kan telle til ni./ Den som ikke digger plassen sin er Sofi!”.

²³ “[...], Volds engasjement [...]”.

Regarding the 90s, in *Ikke. Skillingstrykk fra nittitallet (Not: Broadsides from the Nineties, 1993)*, “it is ‘the enemy of the community’, Jan Erik Vold identifies himself, in this volume, with the police as an opponent” (121, my own translation)²⁴. The whole volume of social critical poems is formed of seven parts written in capital letters: *enten* (*either*), *huset* (*the house*), *makta* (*strength*), *geografi* (*Geography*), *raseri* (*fury*), *rår* (*rule*), *ikke* (*not*).

The poem entitled “Oppgave i praktisk regning” (“A Practical Arithmetic Exercise”) is the third part of the complex poem entitled “Guided tour gjennom Pytt-Pytt-Lan” (“Guided Tour through Pytt-Pytt-Lan”) made of seven sections. This poem as well as most of the poems of this volume presents real and tangible everyday urban situations and several various social and political problems. For instance, the poem “Oppgave i praktisk regning” (“A Practical Arithmetic Exercise”) is built upon a dialogue between a teacher and a student regarding a few simple calculations related to the installation of “kunstfrossen skøytebaner” (“artificial frozen ice skating rinks”) at Bislett Stadium²⁵. Even if the poem seems simple in form and content, being made of five stanzas, each of two lines without rhyme, its message is very serious. This stadium is an emblematic place for the city Oslo and for Norway. According to the article written by Knut Are Tvedt about Bislett Stadium, on this arena were taking place “opening and closing ceremonies, several skating contests, the 1952 Olympic Games and the European Athletics Championship held in 1946 as well as thirteen World Skating Championships and ten European Skating Championships” (Tvedt, my own translation)²⁶. It is also known for its annual Diamond Athletics League organised under the name of *Bislett Games*. In 2004 the old stadium was demolished and rebuilt in the course of less than a year. Unfortunately, at the new Bislett Stadium will not take place speed skating competitions anymore. In fact, this was one of the major reasons why Vold wrote this poem, which ends with a note of disappointment expressed through the rhetorical question: “Hvordan gikk det med skøytesporten da?” (“What about ice skating?”). Even if the whole poem may be characterised by simplicity in content and form, an in-depth analysis reveals that Vold wrote it as a manifesto in order to emphasise that there are not so many who care about cultural heritage of a city represented by old and emblematic buildings whose walls were witnesses to important sports events and unforgettable speed skating competitions. It is the manifesto of the one who

²⁴ “det er ‘samfunnsfiender’ Jan Erik Vold i denne samlingen identifiserer seg med, med politiet som motpart”.

²⁵ Bislett Stadion (Bislett Stadium) is one of the most emblematic buildings in Oslo and according to Jan Erik Vold, the American magazine *Sports Illustrated* stated that the stadium is the most impressive construction, especially used for athletic events, < <http://www.allgronn.org/janerikvold2.html>>, n.d. 14.12.2020.

²⁶ “åpnings- og avslutningsseremonien og skøyteløpene under vinter –OL i 1952, for EM i friidrett i 1946, samt for 13 VM og 10 EM på skøyter”, https://snl.no/Bislett_stadion, accessed 14.12.2020.

is in a permanent search of impressive places, especially those rooted in the past, which give the feeling of belonging to a community. All these constructions and places contributed to the constant shaping of the Norwegian culture and identity. In this sense, Jan Erik Vold, Dag Solstad and Kjartan Fløgstad published the book "Folkets stadion. Bislett" ("The Stadium of the People. Bislett") where the editors together with other contributors wrote about pleasant and enjoyable memories experienced at Bislett Stadium. According to Vold, the whole book reminisces about the unforgettable old sports arena, a place full of memorable emotionally charged events, but it may also be seen as a protest.²⁷

The literary critic Østein Rottem (1946-2004), in his study entitled "Jan Erik Vold – den lekende provokasjon" ("Jan Erik Vold – the Playful Provocation") published in the seventh volume of the *History of Norwegian Literature*, stated the following: "Not: *Broadsides from the Nineties* is rather a political volume of poetry. In this case, Vold has the role of a society critic with an extreme sincerity and a biting sarcasm. [...]. Most of the poems turn the spotlight on [the events] which took place during 'the capital's Right-Regime 1976-1991'" (Øystein 226, my own translation)²⁸.

Taking all these things into consideration, the complexity of the urban poems written by Jan Erik Vold, consist of a variety of city poems which are very different in form and content, each of the aforementioned volumes presenting the needs of the people, of the citizens of the city of Oslo, in different periods of time, beginning with the 60s and ending up with the 90s. With respect to the 60s, the poet portrays a more relaxing and pleasant atmosphere, which is strongly characterised by the new-simple poems. These special poems are for and about people. Regarding the poems from the 60s, the readers can especially identify themselves with everyday urban experiences. The level of irony becomes gradually bitter while moving on to the 80s and to the 90s. It is worth noting that through the literary simplicity of his poems, whose message paradoxically are not that obvious, Vold gives the readers the unique possibility to explore the city of Oslo in a very original way. Therefore, by simply reading his poems which abound in Norwegian names of places, of literary figures, sportsmen, musicians, of politicians, of several important events that took place in Oslo, they all increase the readers' curiosity, by making them search for different explanations, in articles, lexicons, books, in order to understand the message of his urban poems. Thus, through his poems, Vold managed 'to bring his city poems down to earth', making them an important part of the community.

²⁷ <https://www.aftenposten.no/oslo/i/PpV7e/gamle-bislett-til-aere>, accessed 10.12.2020.

²⁸ "Ikke. *Skillingstrykk fra nittitallet (Not: Broadsides from the Nineties)* er mer konsekvent gjennomført politisk diktsamling. Vold går her inn i rollen som samfunnsrefser med bistert alvor og bitende sarkasmer. [...]. Flere av diktene retter søkelyset mot det som skjedde under 'hovedstadens Høyre-regime 1976-1991'".

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Vold, Jan Erik. *Vold's Voice*. Oslo: Gyldendal, 2014.
- . *I Vektens tegn: 777 DIKT (Under the Sign of Libra. 777 Poems)*. Gyldendal, 2000.
- . *IKKE. Skillingstrykk fra nittitallet (Not: Broadsides from the Nineties)*. Gyldendal, 1993.
- . *En som het Abel Ek (One Named Abel Ek, 1988)*. Gyldendal, 1988.
- . *Mor Godhjertas glade versjon. Ja (Mother Goodhearted's Happy Version. Yes)*. Gyldendal, 1968.
- Wærp, Henning Howlid. "Jan Erik Vold (18 October 1939 -)". *Dictionary of Literary Biography, vol. 297: Twentieth-Century Norwegian Writers* edited by Tanya Thresher. Gale, 2004, pp. 343-354.
- . "Virkeligheten, den dusjen: Jan Erik Vold gjennom fire tiår" ("Reality, a Shower - Jan Erik Vold Through Four Decades"). *Nordlit*, no.9, 2001, pp. 97-103.
- Øystein, Rottm. "Jan Erik Vold – den lekende provokasjon" ("Jan Erik Vold – the Playful Provocation"). *Norges litteratur historie (The History of Norwegian Literature)*, edited by Edvard Beyer. J.W. Cappelens Forlag 1997, pp. 207-227.

Webliography:

- Aubert, Marie. "Gamle Bislett til ære" ("In Honour of the Old Bislett"). *Aftenposten*, 20.10.2011, <https://www.aftenposten.no/oslo/i/PpV7e/gamle-bislett-til-aere>. Accessed 10 December 2020.
- Mardal, A. Magnus. "Sofie-norsk og svensk dronning" ("Sophia – the Norwegian and Swedish Queen"). *Store norske Leksikon (The Norwegian Lexicon)*, https://snl.no/Sofie_-_norsk_og_svensk_dronning. Accessed 12 December 2020.
- Vangen, Odd. "Jysk hest" ("Jutland Horse"). *Store norske Leksikon (The Norwegian Lexicon)*, https://snl.no/jysk_hest. Accessed 14 December 2020.
- Vold, Jan Erik. "Den som vil bli president må være god til å dra armkrok" ("The One Who Wants to Become President Must be Good at Arm Wrestling"). *OSLOomgivelser*. n.d. 14 December 2020. <<http://www.allgronn.org/janerikvold2.html>>.
- "Sofies Plass". *Oslo Byleksikon (The Lexikon of the City of Oslo)*. n.d. 14 December 2020. <https://www.oslobyleksikon.no/index.php/Sofies_plass>.
- Tvedt Are Knut. "Bislett stadion" ("Bislett Stadium"). *Store norske Leksikon (The Norwegian Lexicon)*, <https://snl.no/Bislett_stadion>. Accessed 14 December 2020.