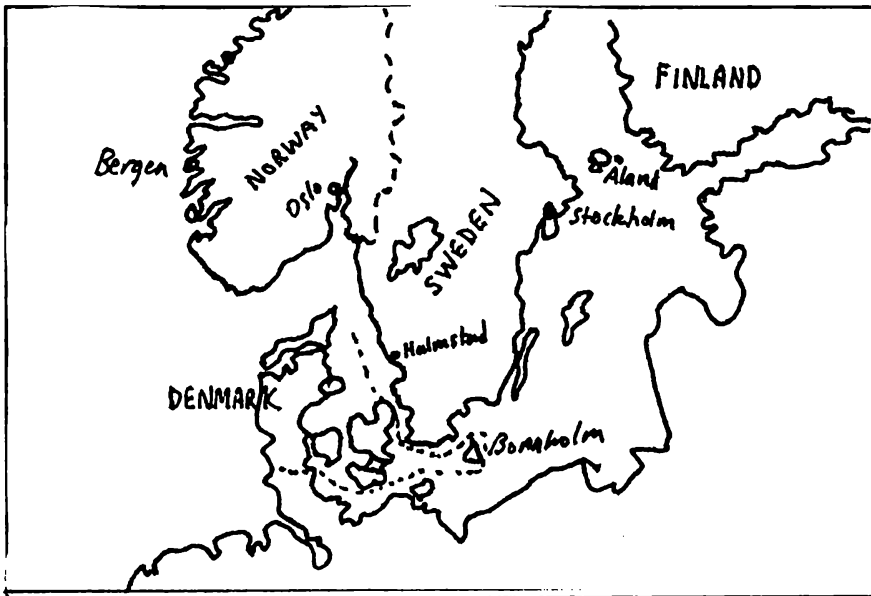


The Scandinavian Settings in Hans Henny Jahn's "Fluß ohne Ufer"

Russell E. Brown

Hans Henny Jahn (1894-1959), one of the great outsiders of German literature, wrote Expressionist plays and novels which expound his radical views of love (pansexual), death (archaic rituals), and society (elitist, pacifist, utopian). His gigantic novel trilogy, *Fluß ohne Ufer*, was composed during exile from Nazi Germany on the Danish Island of Bornholm. It is the story of a lifelong male friendship which begins with the mysterious murder of the protagonist's fiancée. The composer Gustav Anias Horn and his friend Tutein live in South America and Africa before settling down in a series of Scandinavian locales. My subject here is the toponymy of the Nordic settings in *Fluß ohne Ufer*.



"Fluss ohne Ufer"

It is here that the author, who never visited the previous non-European locales, employs a rich fabric of autobiographical reference, disguise, and suppression, of which only the geographical aspect can be considered. Originally intending to go to Göteborg, Sweden, the pair of friends instead board a ship bound for Oslo, Norway. The choice is random, the first available ship for Scandinavia being chosen. In Norway they select at random a new home, the isolated resort village of *Urrland*, off the Sognefjord north of Bergen. Jahnn himself spent the war years 1915-1918 with a friend, Gottlieb Harms, in the town of this name.

For the most part Jahnn is simply recording, through his narrator Horn, actual events, persons, and places from his stay in Norway during the First World War. Numerous nearby towns are correctly identified—Fretheim, Flam, Gudvangen, Ardal, and Lærdal—and even the journey across Norway from Oslo to Myrdal by train, from Myrdal to Fretheim by wagon, from Fretheim to Urrland by fjord steamer, corresponds to the necessary mode of travel in 1915. Spatially, the town of Urrlandsvangen is described almost house by house, as well as the three roads leading out of Urrland, and the surrounding landscape of fjord and mountains. After obtaining a map of this area of Norway on the scale of 1:50,000, I was able to identify many individual houses and landscape features mentioned in the novel and assure myself that, spatially at least, Jahnn was simply transmitting his own very accurate recollections of two decades earlier. The autobiographical impulse overrides the fictional in the Norway setting. It should be mentioned here that Jahnn's other major epic work, the late Expressionist novel *Perrudja* (1929), also is set in Norway, in a different district north of Oslo.

The narrator Horn next devotes two chapters to the eight years of narrative time he lived with Tutein in "Halmberg," Sweden. Jahnn himself did not spend any long period in Sweden; from Urrland he returned to Germany at the end of World War One until Hitler came to power. In the subsequent Bornholm period Jahnn, who worked for the Danish organ building firm Frobenius, did make occasional trips to Sweden to restore church organs, for example in Malmö.

The city of Halmberg, described as a resort town on the west coast of Sweden, does not exist under that name. One is at first inclined to take it to be a simple disguised name for the real Halmstad. In contrast to his treatment of the Norwegian locale, the narrator supplies relatively few

placenames in the area of Halmberg which might aid in deducing what city, if any, stands as the model for this fictitious one. The place names in the two Halmberg chapters are *Traslöv*, *Stafsinge*, *Mosegaard*, and *Skaane*. A street in Halmberg, the *Gustav-Vasa-Gatan*, is mentioned, but this is of little assistance since almost every self-respecting city in Sweden has a street named after this Swedish hero.

Skaane is simply a province name in southern Sweden, adjacent to the area in question. Traslöv lies just inland from the little city of Warberg. Stafsinge is a town north of Falkenberg in the direction of Warberg. The forest of Mosegaard, harder to locate, may be just north of the village of Torpa, itself just north of Warberg. Thus three cities may be considered, running from north to south on the Swedish coast: Warberg (two clues), Falkenberg (one clue), and Halmstad (similar name). In a later chapter it is reported that Tutein sometimes returns to the area, visiting among other places Falkenberg. Since the real name of this town is used, it is eliminated from consideration as the model for "Halmberg."

In the *Epilog*, the third part of *Fluß ohne Ufer*, more than three of the six completed chapters take place in "Halmberg," starting in time immediately after the death of Horn. Since this novel was not complete at the time of Jahnn's death in 1959, Walter Muschg prepared the manuscript for its publication in 1961, not without making certain changes significant for our purposes. For the sake of consistency, he altered the names of some persons and places to correspond to those in the already published *Niederschrift*. Muschg states that some names were still evolving and some were still in the "original" form: the city of Halmberg was first called *Varberg*, then *Varstad* (*Epilog*, postscript, 430). He also mentions that a small map of Varberg and vicinity was found in the manuscript notebook (428).

Thus in this draft of the final part of *Fluß ohne Ufer* we can observe the author at work transforming spatial reality into spatial fiction. At one stage he planned to call Warberg by its real name (like Urrland in Norway), then he changed the second element of the city's name—*berg* became *stadt*—and in the final draft of the *Niederschrift*, which postdates the draft of the *Epilog* which Muschg later published, he decided to alter the first half of the city's name, and restore the original second component (*berg*). Put in another way, he has merged elements from two adjacent Swedish cities, Halmstad and Warberg, to create "Halmberg."

Muschg's decision to alter certain placenames, both to conform to the later usage in the *Niederschrift* and to conform to the map of the Warberg district Jahnn had included in the manuscript, unfortunately deprives us of the sport of tracking down the author's placename disguising, or of observing the process of change, as in the one example Muschg reported, the evolution of the name "Halmberg." Muschg's first procedure needs no defense, but his second (to substitute real names in the *Epilog* wherever they can be recognized) interferes with the clear intention of the author to disguise certain place names. Muschg seems to assume Jahnn wanted to use real names wherever possible – not at all the case.

The new names used about the "Halmberg" locale (not used in the *Niederschrift*) are *Grimeton*, *Rolfstorp*, *Tjerby*, *Englarphof*, *Torstentorp*, and *Mjövad* – all in reference to one character's country excursions – and *Ziegeninsel*, *Strand von Poervik*, and *Blaaskär*. The first four of these place names appear on a detailed map of the Warberg area (1:100,000); *Torstentorp* and *Mjövad*, apparently single farms or inns, could not be located.

"Ziegeninsel" is a translation into German of Getterö, located just north of Warberg. The last three names, taken from a stroll to a fishing village, were not retrievable, although the coast line conforms to the description given and the fishing village (Träslövsläge) is clearly identifiable. Yet, since some of these names are doubtless the substitutions of Muschg for the disguised or left-out names of Jahnn, they are of no use in establishing the creative process of name-giving in the trilogy. The primary identification of "Halmberg" as Warberg is in any case confirmed.

In the chapter "5. Juli" of the *Niederschrift* Horn and Tutein move a last time, to the island of "Fastaholm." The narrator Horn still lives on this island after the death of his friend which is described in the past time segment of this chapter. Here the two time levels and the corresponding spatial planes merge, and the last months of Horn's life on Fastaholm, up to his murder, are presented in diary form.

In regard to placenames, the island of Fastaholm, on which present time action and the act of composition take place, cannot be located on any map. As with "Halmberg," we must seek clues to its real identity in two places: in the biography of the author and in the placenames reported to be on that fictitiously named island. An island is, by its spatially limited nature, particularly well suited to this kind of analysis.

Jahnn himself, like his narrator Horn, composed the whole of the *Niederschrift* while living on an island. This was in the period 1934-1945, when Jahnn lived on the Danish island of Bornholm where he bought a farm. While the fictional events of the narrator's life differ sharply from the author's life there (Jahnn lived on Bornholm with wife and daughter, and was not murdered there) so that the novel is not autobiographical in the story line, the correspondence between the insular situation of both author and narrator naturally leads one to suspect that "Fastaholm" (or FASTERholm" in the unpolished *Epilog*, may simply disguise the name Bornholm. The common second element *-holm* strengthens this hypothesis.

There are eleven placenames mentioned as being localities on Fastaholm in the *Niederschrift* or the *Epilog*. These are, in alphabetical order, *Aasebaeck* (a district), *Borrevig*, *Gallingbakke* (an inn), *Geta*, *Kaasvang*, *Kristinasö*, *Krogedurn*, *Mariahafen*, *Österknud*, *Rotna*, *Saltvig*, and *Vangkaas*.

Of these names, only two relatively unimportant ones could be discovered in the exact form given on a detailed map (1:100,000) of the Danish island: Krogedurn (fisherman's home and inlet) and Kristiansö (a tiny offshore island). This contrasts with the comparable situation of the Swedish Halmberg-Warberg. The port at which Horn and Tutein arrive during the past time story, apparently the main city, is called *Rotna*; this evokes the actual port city Rønne. The town Österknud on Fastaholm may well be Österlars on Bornholm, one Danish male forename (*Knud*) being substituted for another (*Lars*). For the two placenames *Kaasvang* and *Vangkaas*, conceivably an accidental transposition, the actual placenames of *Vang*, *Kaas*, *Sandkaas*, *Teglkaas*, and *Kragkaas* provide both the root words and similar combinations. It would be logical to assume that *Saltvig* on Fastaholm is derived from *Sandvig* on Bornholm. *Gallingbakke* may be related to the real name *Galgebakke*, the author wishing to avoid the component *Galge*, which means "gallows" in Danish. *Borrevik* may stem from *Borrelyng*, *Borregaard*, or *Borrehoved* on Bornholm. For the other Fastaholm names no satisfactory model or variant could be located on Bornholm.

Although the identification of Fastaholm would thus seem to be more or less established by the two exact name adoptions plus analogies to existing names on Bornholm (and even more clearly by the biographi-

cal evidence), a problem begins to appear at the end of the *Niederschrift* and in the *Epilog*. Attached to the first-person *Niederschrift* are official documents referring to the murder of the narrator and to his last will and testament. The presiding lawyer is a Swedish consul who holds degrees from Uppsala and from Helsinki.

This mildly puzzling note — that a Swedish consul in Denmark should have studied not only in Sweden but in Finland — is reinforced by the names of those attending his hearings: Pavel Jerking, Veinö Kauppi, Fält Oaku, names which are of Finnish character. Earlier mentioned was the Finnish name Antli Luuka. Now the convenient assumption *Fastaholm* = *Bornholm* is in danger. Yet other personal names mentioned in the *Niederschrift* are either Danish or Swedish, in any case non-Finnish: Palle Monk, Steen Kjarval, Otto Emil Byder, Aimar Bengtson, Lars Maansson, and Viggo Dellgren.

Another significant ambiguity is the status of Rotna. Earlier the narrator had listed all the island institutions which bore the name Rotna: hotel, newspaper, bank. But in the documents ending the *Niederschrift* Rotna appears only rarely as the address of an official or an institution; the bank where Horn had his account is the “Filialstelle Rotna der Mariahafener Spar und Leihkasse,” the Rotna branch office of the Savings and Loan Bank of Mariahafen. The central position of Rotna (Rønne on Bornholm) has been superseded by Mariahafen; seldom mentioned earlier, Mariahafen is now the home office of the island bank, the seat of the chief doctor and head police official on the island. Between the end of the first volume of the two volume *Niederschrift* and the conclusion, Jahn’s geographical concept of his fictional island is changing, even within this part of *Fluß ohne Ufer* which he himself considered finished and had published.

In the *Epilog*, laid mostly in Halmberg, Sweden, an illegitimate son of Horn is sent to visit his father’s grave on Fastaholm. The child’s mother locates Fastaholm in relation to Halmberg thus: “Fastaholm ist sehr weit von hier. Nördlicher als Stockholm und dann ins Meer hinaus.” (*Epilog* 15) “Fastaholm is very far from here. Farther north than Stockholm and then out in the sea.” Later, Nikolaj sails from Stockholm on the weekly ship to Fastaholm and its port of Mariahafen. Rotna had been the port of entry for Horn and Tutein fifteen years earlier; in the *Epilog* it is mentioned only as being far from Mariahafen.

Not far from Stockholm, in the gulf of Bothnia, lies the Finnish island of Åland. Its main city and port is Mariehamn, which the text simply spells in German. A detailed map reveals two further names mentioned frequently as being on Fastaholm, *Geta* and *Saltvik*. It is clear Jahnn used Åland as a source for place names for his imaginary locale, if not as an actual model. He is purposely leading the reader away from the Bornholm hypothesis: he could as easily have left the location of Fastaholm as vague as it was in the *Niederschrift*.

To summarize: of the eleven place names recorded for Fastaholm in the whole trilogy, many resemble actual Bornholm names, while two minor names are taken directly from Bornholm reality. The Finnish island of Åland is not only precisely located geographically in Scandinavia but provides three exact place names, all important, frequently mentioned towns.

Jahnn's daughter, Signe Trede, informed me that her father had visited Åland several times. Thus Jahnn used his knowledge of the Finnish island to blur the primary identification of the Danish one on which he was living during composition. This was facilitated by the fact that Bornholm place names and especially location had been disguised or withheld, with two exceptions. Symptomatic for the whole process is the relation of Rotna to Mariahafen; the former continues to exist side by side with the "new" town that has displaced it in prominence, in a shadowy geographical relation.

The author's reluctance to allow the positive identification of Fastaholm as Bornholm at any point in the novel is demonstrated by the suppression of the one unique feature of Bornholm: its round churches, built to serve as forts as well. He avoids reference to these in order to prevent an otherwise certain identification, although Jahnn's great interest in architecture (and precisely in this massive form) must have impressed them deeply on his imagination. The round churches were described in detail in an essay Jahnn wrote for the journal *Atlantis*.

If we assume Bornholm to be the original model for Fastaholm, however disguised, an important difference from the Urrland and Warberg-Halmberg situations appears. The Norwegian setting was presented virtually untransformed, while in the Swedish setting the author disguised the main place name, but surrounded the compound imaginary name with enough real names to allow the reader to deduce the actual model, if suf-

ficiently interested. But with Fastaholm, Jahnn's intention shifts in the course of composition from decipherable disguising (Rotna = Rønne) as employed for the Swedish setting to the introduction of place names and geographic location from a second island with which he was not intimately associated. From an etymological point of view the invented first element *Fasta-*, not found in Scandinavian placenames, has the meaning of permanent, firm, or steadfast, as in Danish "fast" which is combined with *-holm* (little island).

Jahnn's purpose is clearly to inhibit autobiographical identification with his protagonist, at least in this spatial respect. Why he did this must remain speculation. Perhaps he wanted to shield family or acquaintances still living on Bornholm; perhaps he wanted to free his chief character Horn from autobiographical interpretation, to make his story more fictional, more independent, by suppressing connections with the author's life in this minor matter. Or perhaps he wanted to create a nameless, archetypal place of exile for his mythical figures.

In any case, Åland and Bornholm are similar in many respects. Both are islands of about the same size, adjacent to Sweden, but under a different flag. In each of their moves through South America, Africa, and Scandinavia the friends choose a new country. Fastaholm, either in Denmark or Finland, maintains this pattern. Each is an almost timeless society living from farming and fishing, suitable for a hermit-like withdrawal from the great modern world of the cities.

In either case, we remain in that Scandinavian setting of mountain, fjord, and sparsely populated countryside which was Jahnn's refuge in both world wars and the Nazi period. Similarly Horn and Tutein avoid a return to their native Germany out of fear of prosecution (for the death of Ellena, Horn's fiancée, and the sinking of their ship, the *Holzschiff*). Through its successive Scandinavian setting of Urrland, Halmberg, and Fastaholm, *Fluß ohne Ufer* provides a spectrum of toponymic strategies in modern European fiction.

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