

Peter Sjølyst-Jackson

# Troubling Legacies

Migration, Modernism and Fascism  
in the Case of Knut Hamsun

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in the Case of Knut Hamsun

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# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vi
<i>Abbreviations</i>	viii
Introduction: Legacies of Hamsun	1
1 ‘. . . Kristiania, That Strange City . . .’: Location and Dislocation in <i>Hunger</i>	20
2 Aristocratic Radicalism: Nietzsche, Brandes and Strindberg	37
3 <i>Mysteries</i> and <i>Pan</i> : Sex, Class and Laughter	57
4 Geographies of the Unhomelike: <i>In Wonderland</i> and the Rhetoric of National Rootedness	76
5 Double Monument: <i>Growth of the Soil</i> – After the Nobel Prize and Nazism	94
6 Reading Hamsun, Reading Nazism	115
7 Treacherous Testimony: <i>On Overgrown Paths</i> and the Rhetoric of Deafness	135
<i>Notes</i>	154
<i>Bibliography</i>	171
<i>Index</i>	181

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# Abbreviations

The bibliography at the end of this book includes a chronology of Hamsun's oeuvre with a comprehensive overview of English translations. Many of the extracts quoted in the body of *Troubling Legacies* (e.g. Hamsun's articles and lectures) are translated by myself, and appear in English for the first time.

Hamsun's 'canonical' works are often available in multiple translations, and the abbreviations below indicate the editions I have used. Where possible, for the benefit of the English-speaking reader, an original edition is 'paired' with a corresponding English translation. Thus, in the endnotes 'S, 316/253' refers to the 1890 Copenhagen edition of *Sult*, page 316, paired with Egerton's translation, *Hunger*, page 253. Separate abbreviations are used for additional translations (e.g. HB & HL). Endnotes also indicate where I have modified the translation ('tr. mod. '), or replaced the 'paired' translation with my own ('my tr. '). All other quotations from Danish and Norwegian texts (primary or secondary) are translated by myself.

## Works by Knut Hamsun

The new edition of Hamsun's *Collected Works* was, alas, not complete at the time of writing; therefore, the old collected works and other collections hitherto published separately are used where necessary.

### Abbreviations for Collected Editions

- NHS 1–27 *Samlede Verker. Ny Utgave.* 27 vols. Ed. Lars Frode Larsen. Oslo: Gyldendal, 2007–2009.
- SV 1–15 *Samlede Verker.* 15 vols. Oslo: Gyldendal, 1954; tenth impression, 2000.

### Other Abbreviations

- DSG *Den siste glede.* NHS vol. 7/*The Last Joy.* Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. Copenhagen and Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2003.

- FDUS *Fra det ubevidste Sjæleliv: Artikler om Litteratur* (From the Unconscious Life of the Mind: Articles on Literature). Oslo: Gyldendal, 1994.
- FMA *Fra det moderne Amerikas åndsliv*. NHS vol. 24/*The Cultural Life of Modern America*. Tr. and Ed. Barbara Gordon Morgridge. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969.
- GS *Growth of the Soil*. Tr. W. W. Worster. London: Souvenir Press, 1995.
- HB *Hunger*. Tr. Robert Bly. London: Picador, 1974.
- HL *Hunger*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. New York: Penguin, 2001.
- HPS *Hamsuns Polemiske Skrifter* (Hamsun's Polemical Writings). Ed. Gunvald Hermundstad. Oslo: Gyldendal, 1998.
- LÆ *I Æventyrland*. SV vol. 3/*In Wonderland*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. Minnesota: Ig, 2004.
- M *Mysterier*. København: Philipsen, 1892; facs. edn. Oslo: Gyldendal, 1992/*Mysteries*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. New York: Penguin, 2001.
- MG *Markens Grøde*. NHS vol. 10/*Growth of the Soil*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. New York: Penguin, 2007.
- OH *Over Havet. Artikler, Reisebrev* (Across the Ocean: Articles and Travel Letters). Ed. Lars Frode Larsen. Oslo: Gyldendal, 1990.
- P *Pan*. NHS vol. 4/*Pan*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. New York: Penguin, 1998.
- PGS *Paa gjengrodede Stier*. Oslo: Gyldendal, 1949/*On Overgrown Paths*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. Copenhagen and Los Angeles: Green Integer, 1999.
- S *Sult*. København: Philipsen, 1890; facs. edn. Oslo: Gyldendal, 1992/*Hunger*. Tr. George Egerton. New York: Knopf, 1920.
- SL 1–2 *Selected Letters Vol 1: 1879–98* and *Selected Letters Vol 2: 1898–52*. Ed. and Tr. Harald Næss and James McFarlane. Norwich, England: Norvik Press, 1990 and 1998.
- UHS *Under høststjernen*. NHS vol. 5/*The Wanderer: Under the Autumn Star and On Muted Strings*. Tr. Oliver and Gunnvor Stallybrass. London: Picador, 1977.
- V *Victoria*. NHS vol. 4/*Victoria*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. New York: Penguin, 2005.

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# Introduction: Legacies of Hamsun

*Why deny that so many 'revolutionary', audacious, and troubling works of the twentieth century have ventured into or even committed themselves to regions that, according to a philosophy which is confident of its liberal and leftist-democratic humanism, are haunted by the diabolical?*

Jacques Derrida<sup>1</sup>

Knut Hamsun (1859–1952) is among European literature's most fascinating, enigmatic and troubling writers. A progenitor of literary modernism in the 1890s, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1920, and widely acclaimed as the great epic novelist of his generation in the following years, he became a Nazi sympathizer in the 1930s and 1940s, and was labelled a traitor following the Second World War. Arrested soon after the liberation of Norway in 1945, Hamsun was condemned for his public support of the German Occupation of Norway since 1940, but was subsequently admitted to the Psychiatric Clinic in Oslo, where the aged and increasingly frail author was held from October 1945 to February 1946, allegedly to assess whether he was fit to stand trial. The psychiatrists assigned to Hamsun's case, Gabriel Langfeldt and Ørnulf Ødegård, had ambitions that went beyond their legal remit. They envisaged the possibility of 'a whole new study in characterology'.<sup>2</sup> In one celebrated instance, their characterological agenda ran up against what was, in effect, a problem of *writing* and a problem of *literature*. Since Hamsun was profoundly deaf in his old age, several questions and answers had to take place in writing, and it was in response to an oddly circular request for 'a characterisation of the nature of your character' that Hamsun returned a scrap of writing containing something of a lesson in literary history. The psychiatrist, on this occasion, wished to know whether Hamsun 'had always been *aggressive*', since he also appeared very 'sensitive', and indeed '*vulnerable*'. 'And what other character traits do you carry within yourself', the psychiatrist probed: 'Suspicious? Egotistical or generous? Of a jealous nature? A distinct sense of justice? Logical? Of a sensitive or cold nature?'<sup>3</sup> Imperviously ignoring the binary hierarchies of these 'character traits', Hamsun admitted that he probably carried all of them at the same time, and reinforced his point by re-writing them into a flat, linear sequence – his 'aggressive' nature; his 'vulnerable, suspicious, egotistic, generous, jealous, right-minded, logical, sensitive nature' – adding, dryly, 'these would all be

human traits'.<sup>4</sup> No single 'character trait' should be privileged over another, he wrote in explanation, a point that had been at issue in literature since the nineteenth century:

I have not in any other way analysed myself than by creating in my books many hundreds of different figures – each separately spun from myself, with the wants and merits that fictional persons have.

The so-called 'naturalistic' period, Zola and his time, wrote about humans with principal character traits. They had no use of nuanced psychology; their humans had a 'prevailing facility' that governed their actions.

Dostoyevsky and many others taught us something else about humans.

Since I began I don't think there exists in my entire production a person with such a whole, rectilinear prevailing facility. They are all without so-called 'character', they are split and divided [*oppstykket*; 'in bits and pieces'], not good and not bad, but both, nuanced, variable in their minds and their actions.

And thus I am undoubtedly myself. [. . .]

That which forms me, furthermore, comes from the divine gift, which made it possible for me to write my books. But this I cannot 'analyse'.

Brandes has called it 'divine Madness'.<sup>5</sup>

The clarity and erudition of the passage stands in strange contrast to the blunt dispatch of the report's final diagnosis. Hamsun was neither 'mentally ill' nor 'insane', concluded the psychiatrists, but was 'a person of permanently impaired mental faculties'.<sup>6</sup> The 'scientific' ambition to classify Nazi sympathizers as abnormal, compromised in this case by the fact that the diagnosis only furnished the legal authorities with a doubtful pretext for dropping the criminal charges and for transferring the case to a civil compensation claim, speaks of a troubled history. These uneasy agendas of the postwar era, however, encountered in Hamsun, as assuredly as they disavowed, the 'divine Madness' of writing and the uncanny survival of literary traces: the French novelist Émile Zola, the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky, the Danish and Jewish literary critic Georg Brandes, and the critique of character psychology which dates right back to the Swedish playwright and novelist August Strindberg, whose 'modern characters', Hamsun wrote in 1889, were not 'types' but 'agglomerations of time's faded and proximate fragments of culture, scraps of books and newspapers; bits of people'.<sup>7</sup>

The scene of writing at the Psychiatric Clinic in Oslo indicates, nevertheless, a troubling fissure within and between the writings, politics and public personas of Hamsun. How was it possible for an author, who founded his writing career upon the rejection of reductive 'character psychology' and simplistic 'types' in European literature, to commit himself and his writing to a political movement, Nazism, that promoted only the most violently reductive schemas of 'types' in the twentieth century, through its racism, anti-Semitism and

totalitarianism? What, in the abyss of a writer's project to inscribe in literature the nuanced, split, divided and fragmentary experience of modernity, were the affinities with Nazism?

Despite the appearance of monumental unity and totality furnished by the *Samlede Verker* (Collected Works), Hamsun's writings remain highly marked by the experience of fragmentation, displacement, disorder and, as I shall be arguing in this book, *a dislocated history of migration* inscribed into the grain of his literary texts. His most compelling books, bound together only by the signature across the intricate itineraries of his writings, entail an ongoing, autobiographical inscription, which does not concern the many references to 'facts' in his texts subsequently verified by diligent biographers, but relates instead to the shifting positions of Hamsun's books, novels, polemical articles and lectures – their audacious compositions, styles, figures and formal innovations – which can nonetheless be historicized in illuminating ways with reference to the movements, displacements and turns of Hamsun's life and career, coming as these do in many different guises, and which never belong simply to one place or location, whether he writes as a tailor's son from the backwaters of rural Norway in the mid-nineteenth century; as a migrant who had joined the great exodus to America in the 1880s; as a 'radical aristocrat' lampooning the European literary establishment of the 1890s; as a tourist travelling through Russia and the 'Orient' at the turn of the century; as a heir to the Norwegian 'poetocracy' after the deaths of Henrik Ibsen in 1906 and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson in 1910; as a conservative polemicist warning against the evils of Russian Bolshevism and American industrialism in the decades that followed; as a Nobel laureate extolling the virtues of peasant values and the homely soil around 1920; as an occasional but grimly insistent apologist for the German Nazi regime in the 1930s and 40s; or as a beleaguered old author writing again after the Second World War, bringing his long career to its final words, as the legal authorities handed down their final verdict in 1948 – 'and I end my writing'.<sup>8</sup>

The trajectory sketched above, with which this book is concerned, raises further questions. Although there is wide agreement, today, that Hamsun was indeed a pioneer of modernism and later a Nazi sympathizer, it is in fact much harder to discern what 'modernism' and 'Nazism' are supposed to mean here, since both neologisms – separately and particularly in combination – call up a bewildering array of possible correspondences and dizzying mirroring effects, in short, what Jacques Derrida in a related context has called a 'bustling confusion'.<sup>9</sup> In Hamsun's case, first of all, there is a strong sense of *historical distance* between the works most commonly identified as modernist and his later Nazi sympathies, in so far as the early works – *Hunger* (*Sult*, 1890), *Mysteries* (*Mysterier*, 1892) and *Pan* (*Pan*, 1894) – came at least three decades before the fascist and Nazi movements had any purchase outside Italy and Germany. This last point relates, furthermore, to a more problematic sense of *geographical and cultural dislocation* between Hamsun and the various metropolitan centres of Europe. His writings never belonged to any of the canonized movements of

modernism, even as he was read and admired by such figures as André Breton in Paris who, in his 'Manifesto of Surrealism' from 1924, found in *Hunger* an anticipation of his own theory of automatic writing,<sup>10</sup> or Lou Andreas-Salomé in *fin de siècle* Vienna, who found in *Pan* an escape from the city into the dark eroticism of nature.<sup>11</sup> Neither did he belong to any of the movements of artistic and literary fascism associated with modernism in the 1930s; he never formulated an aesthetic programme tied to fascist movements unlike, for example, the French writers Robert Brasillach and Pierre Drieu la Rochelle;<sup>12</sup> and neither did Hamsun's aesthetic programme of the 1890s entail the kind of excitement with modern technology, speed and militarism that led Filippo Marinetti and futurism to align radical formal experimentation with fascist politics. On the contrary, in the period normally associated with 'modernism' and 'fascism', Hamsun had become the celebrated author of *Growth of the Soil* (*Markens Grøde*, 1917), which was widely received in 1920s Europe as an epic reassertion of tradition and peasant values. Lauded as a timely call for a return to the labour of the soil, the novel's depiction of the corruptions of industrial modernity was closely associated, by European reviewers across the political spectrum, with the mechanized mass killings of the First World War. The idea of a more peaceful coexistence with nature would later appeal to certain strains in Nazi ideology as well, whose propaganda drew heavily upon the idea of peasant values, but in another idiom – 'blood and soil' – in which dreams of a rustic Arcadia could coexist alongside the violent agendas of racial purity (blood) and the homeland (soil). It was within this frame of reference that the Nazi ideologue, Alfred Rosenberg – during the 1930s when the Nazi regime rose to power in Germany through brutal repression, imperialist expansion and modernist glorification of technology, speed and militarism – wrote of the Norwegian author and *Growth of the Soil* as 'the great present day epic of the Nordic will in its primordial form'.<sup>13</sup>

Was Hamsun a Nazi? The question itself tends only to provoke the blinded compulsions of condemnation and apologia. The demand for binary answers conflates what I would suggest are at least two sets, or complexes, of questions which often converge, but which should nevertheless be carefully differentiated. On the one hand, then, there is a complex of questions relating to the political positions Hamsun took up *as a public figure and polemicist* in his many articles, essays and lectures in different contexts and at different points in history; on the other hand, there is a related but by no means identical complex of questions concerning *the movements of his literary works* across six decades, from 1889 to 1949, including some twenty-four novels and books, five plays, three short story collections and a verse collection. The 'literary' works, however, are haunted by the 'polemical' works – and vice versa, as we shall see at several points in this book. This is a tricky problematic by itself, and has often been overwhelmed by other questions lurking in the wings, but which cannot be conjured away. To what extent were his literary works complicit with the ideological agendas of Nazism? Is it ever possible to know, in fact, what the

seductions of Hamsun's texts will have been in the solitary enclosures of so many mute readers? The last question riddles the one preceding it, though it should not, I would maintain, simply abolish it. This book proposes to approach these complexes of questions in different ways, but emphasizes from the start, that the field of inquiry, as well as Hamsun's works, entails that which Derrida calls *dissemination*, which Maud Ellmann usefully sums up as 'the possibility of error, accident, fragmentation, irrecoverable waste and loss'.<sup>14</sup>

## The Work of Deconstruction

Hamsun remains today as an endlessly disquieting presence in the Norwegian national canon, quite unlike the proud heritage of such figures as Ibsen, Munch and Grieg. In the words of Atle Kittang, one of Hamsun's most discerning readers, the affair 'haunts Norwegian culture' as a 'collective trauma', a 'Norwegian Hamsun-trauma'.<sup>15</sup> Or, in the words of novelist Jan Kjærstad, to 'discuss Hamsun is to discuss the kernel of Norwegian literature. All Norwegian authors have a Hamsun-complex'.<sup>16</sup> This book wishes to open up this somewhat proprietorial debate onto other fields of inquiry, and takes its cue from some of Derrida's most thought-provoking formulations in response to the 'affairs' of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger and the Belgian and American literary theorist Paul de Man. At stake, for Derrida, are the respective specificities of Heidegger and de Man's involvements with Nazism, the nature of their complicity at different points, and how these issues might be read, analysed and interpreted in conjunction with their theoretical and philosophical works. The controversies attendant to the cases of Heidegger and de Man in the late 1980s, however, were often characterized by a certain refusal, on the part of various critics and scholars, simply to read their works, which were often reduced to common denominators associated with 'fascism' or 'Nazism', and condemned as such. Derrida's responses were not simply a scholastic rejection of erroneous and tendentious (non)readings, however, but a rejection of the manipulative rhetoric in which the condemnations and apologias were couched, from where he proposed new and much more challenging ways of reading Nazism alongside literary and philosophical texts. Insisting that the 'condemnation of Nazism, whatever must be the consensus on this subject, is not yet a thinking of Nazism',<sup>17</sup> one of Derrida's most stunning interventions comes through his insistence that Nazism should not be reduced to any set of comforting schemas or definitions since this, he maintains, would fail to discern and also fail to deconstruct, what remains most troubling about Nazism, namely, that it was a complex, differentiated and internally inconsistent formation which nonetheless carried through the worst kinds of violence, precisely, by the violently *reductive* logic of racism, anti-Semitism and totalitarianism. There is a rigorous coherence and consistency, therefore, in Derrida's injunction that 'one must guard against reproducing the logic one claims to condemn'.<sup>18</sup>



Derrida's questions for the Heidegger-text, moreover, has far-reaching implications for reading, and for thinking about fascism and literature in general:

Instead of erasing or trying to forget it, must one not try to account for this experience, which is to say, for our age? And without believing that all of this is already clear for us? Is not the task, the duty, and in truth the only new or interesting thing to try to recognise the analogies and the possibilities of rupture between, on the one hand, what is called Nazism – that enormous, plural, differentiated contingent whose roots are still obscure – and, on the other hand, a Heideggerian thinking that is also multiple and that, for a long time to come, will remain provocative, enigmatic, still to be read.<sup>19</sup>

Derrida, in other words, displaces the premises upon which so many debates around fascism and literature are based, including those of Hamsun scholarship. As anyone familiar with 'the endlessly recurring debate on Hamsun' in Norway would recognize, 'the analogies and the possibilities of rupture' between Hamsun and Nazism are enormous and provide much fuel for condemnation and apologia.<sup>20</sup> The Nazi movement in all its horror provokes condemnation, and rightly so, but has resulted in an often unthinking ritual, reflected in the rise of democratic humanism in Europe and America during the postwar era, to purge Western culture of a violent history which, as the Martiniquan writer Aimé Césaire points out, was never the exclusive property of the Nazis in the first place. The sheer provocation of Nazism for European liberals, argues Césaire, was the terrifying manner by which this movement brought the violence of racism and imperialism *home* to Europe.<sup>21</sup>

But the terrifying spectre of Nazism continues to spread panic and confusion in the field of criticism, and tends often to generate a self-perpetuating 'debate', which is more accurately described as a set of recurring accusations and counteraccusations, condemnations and apologies, attempts to expel or rehabilitate, which share in common only the naïve wish that the whole problem might disappear. Derrida, however, opens up the troubling possibilities of what both condemnation and apologia actively ward off, namely, that the confluence of 'literature' and 'politics' happens as *a process in deconstruction*: the bewildering array of splits and schisms within and across different texts, histories and forces – separating, converging and displacing one another. Political responsibility, in Derrida, always comes back to the risky adventure of reading, to the incalculable future of the texts in question, and the responsibility *to the future* with regard to their troubling remains. The title of this book, *Troubling Legacies*, then, concerns the questioning of such remains, of recalling fragile and uncanny remnants of a corpus, along with the disturbing excesses these can generate. This book does not, therefore, propose to assess any single 'legacy', as though it were an autonomous, essentially stable, literary object. I wish to reflect upon Hamsun's multiple, contradictory, even mutually exclusive legacies; to convey the singularity of the literary texts while remaining sensitive to questions of

historical context, textual analysis and translation which, in turn, may underpin a more effective way of addressing the troubling remains of this – can I bring myself to say it? – *great* writer.

## Scope and Itinerary

The gaps and omissions of *Troubling Legacies* are, of course, the inevitable result of choices and exclusions within and between a tremendous mass of texts that, as far as this book is concerned, must also contend with the fact that Hamsun remains something of an oddity – or foreign particle – in the world of Anglo-American criticism. My ambition, here, is not to *redress* this situation (by recourse to another monumental chronology, for example), but rather, to *address* questions of literature and contextuality in general through Hamsun – and hopefully in a way that might open his works onto other fields of literature, politics and theory. It entails, therefore, an engagement with that which Derrida, in *Spectres of Marx*, calls ‘the radical and necessary *heterogeneity* of an inheritance’. Since a legacy or inheritance ‘is never gathered together’ and ‘never one with itself’, one must always choose from several possibilities:

Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in the injunction to *reaffirm by choosing*. ‘One must’ means *one must* filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibilities that inhabit the same injunction. [. . .] If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it. [. . .] One always inherits from a secret – which says: ‘read me, will you ever be able to do so?’<sup>22</sup>

Legacies are riddled with silences, secrets and aporias; they trouble and out-flank the necessary choices of critical endeavour, spur it on, and make countless demands.

The critical orientation of this book combines deconstruction and psycho-analysis, especially the works of Derrida and Freud, with a historically informed reading of Hamsun. I begin, in the sub-section towards the end of this introduction, with *From the Cultural Life of Modern America* (*Fra det moderne Amerikas Aandsliv*, 1899), the fierce polemic that won Hamsun his initial notoriety in Scandinavia, but which speaks of a transitory experience of migration and a violent clash with the bustling modernity of America, which stood in such sharp contrast to the author’s background. The dislocations of migration are everywhere manifest in *Hunger*, which I discuss in Chapter 1, through a close reading of its figures of writing, materiality and dislocation. Chapters 2 and 3 then pursue the galloping Hamsun-text into *Mysteries* and *Pan*, coming in the wake of his polemic foray into ‘Aristocratic Radicalism’ and the works of Strindberg, Brandes, Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky; out of this I develop a reading

of sex, class and laughter, drawing on psychoanalysis and deconstruction. Chapter 4 picks up the trail of Hamsun's literary migration at a later point – on his journey through the Caucasus region of imperial Russia in 1899, re-plotted as the semi-fictional travelogue *In Wonderland (I Æventyrland, 1903)* – in order to think through problems of nation building, identity, language and ethnocentric geopolitics in Hamsun's authorship. His complicity with the Nazi movement is thereafter addressed more systematically in Chapters 5 and 6, initially through a reading of *Growth of the Soil* and its histories of reception, a set of texts that attend to some of the most terrifying events yet most benign pastoral removes of the twentieth century, and thereafter through a historical interpretation of Hamsun's disturbing polemical articles from the 1930s and 1940s, along with some reflections on his later novels, as these were read within two very different currents of the Nazi movement, as represented by Alfred Rosenberg and Martin Heidegger. The book concludes, finally, with a reading of the semi-autobiographical *On Overgrown Paths (Paa gjengrodde Stier, 1949)*, which Hamsun wrote as a response to his treatment at the hands of the Norwegian authorities after the Second World War, and whose treacherous provocations on the scene of accusations and counteraccusations in postwar Norway, dissolves into a moving memory, or narrative fiction, as the writer is called back through his expiring perceptions to the site of migration, in rural America of the late-nineteenth century, cast adrift – and longing for home.

Adolf Hitler, maintained Hamsun on the eve of the Norwegian liberation in 1945, had been 'a prophet of the gospel of justice for all nations'.<sup>23</sup> Hamsun's stance is indefensible, but consistent in a way posterity often renders incomprehensible, in part, because fascist nationalism was rejected as 'treason' in the postwar era, and thus abjected at a historical moment when *nationalism* as such was being recuperated and reinforced. The basic refusal to think through the implications of Hamsun's nationalist stance thereby speaks of another refusal, characteristic of European social democracies, to fully acknowledge the incompatibility between the idea of democratic inclusiveness and the assumptions of nationalism, which always presuppose borders and exclusions, while turning a blind eye to the violence such borders and exclusions often entail. The upshot, for our present purposes, is simply that Hamsun's nationalism cannot be understood within a framework that takes national codes for granted, precisely because his nationalist politics are rooted in the dislocating transgressions of migration: 'During my rather long life', said Hamsun during the legal hearings of his case in 1947, 'in all the countries where I have travelled, and among the ethnic groups I have mingled with, I have ever and always preserved and upheld *the homeland* in my mind'.<sup>24</sup> Hamsun's rhetoric of national rootedness, I argue, is inextricably bound up with the schisms of migration and displacement that characterized his background. As Derrida notes in *Spectres of Marx*: 'All national rootedness is rooted first of all in the memory or the anxiety of a displaced – or displaceable – population'.<sup>25</sup>

The possibility of historically 'located' reading, now, is already complicated by what might be called *the heterogeneous migration of the oeuvre*. The Hamsun-text proves particularly difficult to historicize, partially because the author himself never 'belonged' to any single place, but also because aspects of his works, often in translation, have been read in such divergent ways in different times and places, as might be indicated by simply listing the incongruous mix of twentieth-century notabilities who admired his work, or aspects thereof – including literary modernists of such diverse kinds as Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, Katherine Mansfield and Rebecca West, or such different Marxist writers as Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht and Maxim Gorky, or different theorists and philosophers, such as Roman Jakobson and Martin Heidegger, or again different Nazi ideologues, such as Alfred Rosenberg and Joseph Goebbels, or yet again authors such as Henry Miller, Ernest Hemmingway and Paul Auster. This indicates, above all else, the sheer variety and startling differences within and between the many cultural, literary and political currents with which aspects of Hamsun's works have found, and continue to find, their polyphonic resonances. The heterogeneous migration of the oeuvre entails, therefore, two separate yet often converging sets of movement: the internal movements of the oeuvre as an agglomeration of turns, transformations and repetitions and, thereupon, the scattering of that oeuvre in multiple fragments, through re-editions, revised editions, translations and re-translations.

## Politics of Reading

The agendas of the postwar era have tended to foreclose the heterogeneous migration of the oeuvre by suspending Hamsun, so to speak, between two monolithic entities called 'Nazism' and the 'Western canon'. It is notable and also deeply symptomatic that two of the most influential contributions to international Hamsun scholarship – those of James McFarlane and Leo Löwenthal, the former a British literary historian who sought to re-inscribe Hamsun's early works into the Western canon, and the latter a German Frankfurt School critic who maintained that Hamsun's entire oeuvre was a one-way street to fascism – never acknowledged each other, even as their accounts both appeared in the English language in 1956 and 1957 respectively. The sheer contrast between the two sets the scene, in many ways, for the conflicting agendas that have riddled Hamsun scholarship ever since. For McFarlane, *Hunger* was 'merely the release in a new form of a body of thought that had been building up for the better part of a century; it was the expression in the literary mode of that same thing to which Freud was soon to give scientific formulation: speculation about the ways of the unconscious mind'.<sup>26</sup> For Löwenthal, by contrast, *Hunger* only 'states the themes that are almost endlessly repeated in the later novels', namely, 'abandonment of any participation in public life, submission to the stream of incomprehensible and incalculable forces, distrust of the intellect,