



The Discoverer

Jan Kjaerstad , Barbar Haveland (Translator)

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The Discoverer finds Jonas released from prison, having completed his sentence for the death of his wife. He his aboard the Voyager, a ship which is exploring the longest fjord in the world, along with his estranged daughter. Onboard, he explores his past, telling his own version of what happened the fateful night of his wife's death.

The Discoverer Details

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From Reader Review *The Discoverer* for online ebook

Elaine says

Reading *The Discoverer* is like getting the gift of perceiving a person's inner dialogue, that never-ending discourse running through our minds, changing as we see or smell or hear something different, recall events and people, get ideas which travel to other ideas, all the while praising, criticizing, blaming, feel guilt. The result is an exhilarating roller coaster ride not only inside Jonas's head, but also of the scenery he is mentally or actually viewing. Kjaerstad, the author, or, rather, Jonas makes Norway sound so glorious, I had to restrain myself from going online and buying a plane ticket. Jonas also describes vividly both architecture and art in Norway. He speaks of great Norwegian painters as if they were on a par with Rembrandt, Michaelangelo, Titian, Chagall: all the Western greats. The problem is that I, at least, never heard of any of them, but when I do get on that plane to Oslo, I will run to all the museums and public buildings he describes with such admiration, love, and detail. Or, maybe I'll get on a ship to see the magnificent fjords he waxes eloquent about.

Because the novel is about thinking, it is not chronologically arranged. Nor is it arranged according to the different narrators. You will be inside Jonas's head and then, in the next paragraph, see an *I* or *we* which is clearly not Jonas. This person allows us to see Jonas as a human being or see something else.

Just as our inner dialogue goes back to certain subjects again and again, so does Jonas's. Something he spoke of earlier, suddenly appears again in his own words still, but with a detail added or omitted or a comment added. Surprisingly, this is not intrusive. It heightens our sense of seeing into his head and feeling what he feels.

The American reader will find the Norway-centric vision in this book quite a change from the British-American Umwelt we so take for granted, both in our thoughts and our reads. Here, we are privy to Jonas's constant boasting and criticizing of Norwegian society, his casual and serious mention of Norwegian historical characters. His boasting takes the form as mentioned above of claiming a greater place in art than is usually accorded to Norway by Europeans and Americans, but also, he thinks that Norwegian scenery is the most stupendously beautiful in the world. Once in a while, a sneaking thought entered my mind: methinks he protesteth too much. But then I recall, from speaking both with Swedish and Norwegian colleagues and friends, that, in Scandinavia, Norway was the backward country until the 20th century. Because Sweden once governed Norway, perhaps, the Swedes traditionally have looked down on the Norwegians.

One example--not from the book: a Norwegian scholar told me that when Swedish speakers are on Norwegian television, there are no subtitles for the Swedish. Norwegians understand Swedish just fine. Indeed, the Swedes should be able to understand the Norwegians as easily. A Swedish friend of mine told me that on Scandinavian Airlines, the stewards speak their own Scandinavian language: Danish, Swedish, or Norwegian, and the passengers have no problem understanding any of them. However, when Norwegian speakers are on Swedish television, the Swedes use subtitles. Linguists have long known that people will fail to understand a language which should be mutually comprehensible with one's own if they feel that the other speaker is inferior. Another instance of this is that German immigrants after WWI told me they couldn't understand Yiddish when they heard it spoken, but Yiddish speakers have no problem understanding Germans. Younger Germans, however, tell me that they understand Yiddish as if it were English or German.

Forgive this digression. There are two other matters: Jonas's central quest and this translation. As for Jonas, the thread that runs through this dense and populated novel is his quest for a system of classifying knowledge. He learns about the Dewey Decimal System while still a boy. It bothers him that knowledge is so segmented this way. Rather, he wants a system that will capture the relations between various disciplines. He rightly sees that all knowledge is interrelated. As a linguist, I have to know about the structure of different languages, but also about anatomy, physics, neurochemistry, social groupings, anthropology, psychology, psychiatry, history, biology, and literature. I may have left a few fields out. Jonas eventually creates a landmark television series on various topics, but with the last show suddenly bringing together strands from all the preceding as a unified whole. Oh, would that such a series really existed. Well, maybe it does. I don't know a thing about Norwegian TV. The quest does not dominate the novel. There are events and characters and music and memories, loves, guilts, all the things that made Jonas Jonas.

A word about Barbara Haveland's translation. It is clear that she has learned British English, not American, but that's not the problem. The problem is that I strongly suspect that she has nowhere near a native speaker's competence in English. I do have friends who have settled in the US, whose native language is not English, but their English is near-native speaker competence. Haveland's is good, but not that good. She misuses words, such as calling a kitchen range a *cooker* and speaking of a marked trail as being *blue flashed*. She obviously meant the trail was *blazed* with blue paint. (As they are here in New England as well.) She also awkwardly repeats the set phrase "Not for nothing..." as a sentence opener frequently, apparently unaware of the colloquial nature of this usage. It stands out from the rest of the prose.

The biggest error she makes is an entire long passage in which she uses *would* constantly. Upon first reading, it didn't make sense because Jonas is talking about a girl he just met and the passage is a description of behavior that could occur only if they were married or living together. So I read it again, and saw the problem. I don't know modern Norwegian, but I did study Old Norse and Old English. Old Norse *vylda* and Old English *wold-* were cognates (forms of two languages that come from one parent language.) In Old Norse and in Old English, these forms were subjunctive. That is, they were used when someone was saying that the things being talked about were fanciful or wouldn't necessarily ever happen.

I suspect that Modern Norwegian has kept this meaning for *vylda*, or whatever its current form is. Older English literature often has *would* used in this sense. However, in today's English *would* is also used to mean a habitual action in the past that no longer occurs in the present. For instance, I could say of my son, Rick, that "He would tear his pants whenever we got dressed up." or "He would always be up in a tree." Oh, we can use *would* to mean what Haveland apparently did, if we preface it with a *perhaps* or an *if*, as in "Perhaps he would come in for dinner, and she would have it all set, and they would sit down and talk about the day's events." On its own, however, it sounds like habitual past action.

Of course, such a an error, leading to a misreading makes one doubt the translation as a whole. However, the whole does hang together. I found no other instance in which a passage is apparently mistranslated, and even with this one, I could figure out what was meant. Unfortunately, only three of Kjaerstad's novels have been translated into English, and I don't know yet who translated the other two. But I'll find out. I wouldn't miss reading them.

Zoe says

Masterpiece !!!

Susan says

Odd gargantuan structure of overlapping spirals each containing a peak or an abyss describes the life of the multi-faceted protagonist, hardly everyman, rather a master of many arts who experiences intensely everything that comes his way.

Manny says

Oppdageren (*The Discoverer* in English) is the third and concluding volume of the trilogy that starts with *Forførerer*. Since the three volumes form a tightly-knit whole, it makes most sense to review the whole series, which is one of the most powerful, moving, original novels I've read in years. It's staggeringly inventive and daring, and it's not just displaying post-modernist cleverness for its own sake. Quite the contrary. The book has a burning desire to reach out to you, touch you, and change your life forever. It's very rare to find something like this.

The rest of this review is available elsewhere (the location cannot be given for Goodreads policy reasons)

[After rereading the series]

It is a masterpiece. The beginning is mysterious and enticing; the middle, difficult and painful; the ending, extraordinarily powerful and moving.

A recurring image, which is presented in many different forms, is M?y?, the veil of illusion. At one point, Jonas, who is applying to architecture school, gives a presentation on his favorite part of Oslo. He arranges it in three semi-transparent layers. The outermost one shows the town as it is today. Behind it, and clearly visible, you can see the town as he remembers it, before it was brutally remodelled in the 60s. And if you look carefully, you can see just a hint of the third layer: a strange, temple-like building, quite unlike anything in the "real" Oslo.

As usual, the novel is referring to itself. Every book has a surface, and most worthwhile books have something underneath that surface, which you can see if you're paying any attention. But under both of these, one can sometimes catch a glimpse of the true book, the book the author wanted to write but was unable to realise due to his mortal limitations. The true version of this book is visible with quite unusual clarity. It's a trick, but it's a wonderful, awe-inspiring trick.

To conclude, for other readers who wondered what they looked like:

en sitronsommerfugl og en dagpåfugløy, en admiral og en neslesommerfugl

[After the third reading]

Well, no doubt about the masterpiece part. Some questions which that so far hypothetical person who's going to write the first serious critical study of the Jonas Wergeland trilogy might want to think about:

(view spoiler)

Perhaps I'll read it a fourth time when I've had time to think about it more.

Greg says

Back in early summer I started reading this trilogy. In my head I had a perfect plan. I gave each of the first two books roughly a week to be read, and when I finished the second book the third one would be arriving in the store. I'd finish *The Conquerer* and that day, or maybe the next copies of *The Discoverer* would rise up from the store's basement, I'd buy the book and read it immediately. Like all perfect plans this one went to shit. *The Discoverer* was delayed in coming out by a few months, so by the time it did come out the details of the first two books were a little hazy. On the plus side Karen got the dude from Open Letter to send me a free copy of the book after she told him how much I was looking forward to it.

In my review for *The Seducer* I mentioned Henryk Górecki's Symphony No. 3, Symphony of Sorrowful Songs, I'm mentioning it again because the structure of the narrative constantly reminds me the first 8 minutes of that musical work. Both are composed of beautifully simple strands that seamlessly weave in and out of each other, brining a particular theme or story to the forefront before allowing it to be replaced by another. In themes from the book it's like juggling, or the patterns of an oriental rug, but I like my Górecki analogy better.

What to say about a book that you don't want to give any details away about?

Sadly, I live my life for moments like reading this series of books. I could say that I read constantly, and am always looking for new books and authors that I haven't heard of yet hoping to find books like this one. The ones that are 'throw yourself down the stairs' great. There is no real way to go out and just read these books though, and miss all the chaff. It's all the chaff that helps make the great books so great. I don't know if that makes any sense. In another musical analogy from my life, if I hadn't spent so much time listening to shitty heavy metal music, and groaning about the awful pretentiousness of bands like Led Zeppelin and other 'classic rock' bands, the effect of putting the Ramones "Blitzkrieg Bop" on for the first time wouldn't have been as life-shattering as it was. This book is nothing like the Ramones, and now I'm thinking that I might be belittling the book by even mentioning them here. In my life some other book would be like the Ramones, and this, along with books like *Magnetic Field(s)* and *Infinite Jest* would be some later band or type of music that I would have never gotten to if I had stayed stuck in some degenerate phase, and now almost twenty years later still only listened to Metallica and Slayer.

Returning to the idea at the start of the last paragraph, I spend lots of time in my life on a search for something as good as this, to discover something great, and then immediately afterwards the search goes on. I've done this with music and with books and ideas. I think that it's some kind of sick compulsion, and it's not necessarily healthy. When I think of how much time is given to this pursuit, the hours that turn into days and months, and probably eventually into years of my life with my nose in various books I know that I could accomplish so much if I could redirect the reading energy into something else; something tangible? Reading really only externally produces these reviews, which aren't exactly what I'd want to say justifies a meaningful life. What am I looking to connect with all of the various subjects and books that I have/am/will read? Why am I even writing about this here in this review about this book? Could this be more than just a bloggish egotistically self-aware rambling?

I'm resigning to the fact that I have no idea how to review this book. I think that people should read the whole series, one right after another. There are interesting little details that I noticed between the first and second books that I would never have noticed if I had waited awhile before reading the next one. I'm sure there are the same types of details that I missed in this book. One day I'll go back and re-read all of them as one giant 2000 page Proustian story about the famous television personality who enters his house one day to find his wife dead.

Judging from reviews for the first novel in the trilogy, this isn't for everyone. What I find beautiful and perfect others find annoying and distracting. If you need to have stories told linearly and you need the security blanket of an absolutely reliable narrator than this book probably isn't for you.

In a just literary world, this would have come out with much fanfare, and would right now be sitting on top of the *New York Times* bestseller list, with Dan Brown's newest romp through the muddled delusions of New Age reader's conspiracies gathering dust in some warehouses waiting to be re-pulped into something more noble for the poor tree's that had to give up their lives to be used for his drivel; such as toilet paper. We don't live in that just world, so finding books like this trilogy is just that much more awesome, because I can read and get the pleasures of loving the book, and the elitist high of knowing that I know of something really great that most people don't.

Viva elitism!!

tim says

Why are the books that seep down deepest and saturate our core the very ones that prove most difficult to review? Deleted review after deleted review. Will this be the one I finally release with minimal regret? Why do I feel so compelled to write a review for this anyway when I've never felt so much terror at the prospect of failure? Because, this is one of *those* books. It needs to be read, no matter how far my fumbling fingers fall short of doing it justice.

The Discoverer is a work of art incomplete without it's precedent parts. Alone, this last installment of the Jonas Wergeland trilogy is a wonder above. But don't believe those who say it stands alone. No. Don't believe it. Read them all. Then and only then will the unified entirety elevate your reading experience into that otherwise invisible realm of infinite potential that we all know exists, just out of reach of the everyday business-as-usual hell. Without books like this, I just don't know what I'd do.

Maurice Conchis says

Jan Kjørstad er næsten et fortidsminde, en duft fra ungdommen, og jeg kan på ingen måde gengive, hvad hans trilogi handler om eller i hvilken rækkefølge.

Hvad jeg til gengæld kan, er ihukomme den grådige følelse af at inhalere alle tre bøger i en kæderygende tåge af vellyst. De var fremragende skrevet, og jeg ringer nok snart på Jonas Wergelands dør igen.

Elisa Halvegård says

A new way of writing, a wonderful discovery! Very different from everything else I have read!

Bettie? says

Description: *Jonas Wergeland has served his sentence for the murder of his wife Margrete. He is a free man again, but will he ever be free of his past?*

The third volume of Jan Kjørstad's award-winning trilogy finds Jonas aboard the Voyager, a small boat exploring the reaches of the great Sognefjord in Western Norway. Also on board, are four young people engaged in a multi-media project to chart all aspects of the fjord – its geography, people, and history. But, like the space probe the boat is named for, Jonas's personal journey of discovery reaches far beyond the usual confines of time or space. With all the breathtaking prowess of a master juggler, Jan Kjørstad throws episode after episode from Jonas Wergeland's life into the air and holds them, suspended, like planets in the solar system. And the reader, once again, is drawn into Wergeland's universe, and taken on a journey – this time with his daughter as guide – to discover finally the truth about his life, and what led to the death of his wife.

Opening: **Behold this man. Behold this man, as he feels three tugs on the rope and slowly, after smiling uncertainly, proceeds to traverse, to edge out onto those dauntingly airy galleries. Behold this man as he inches across the rock face; see how with the caution of the novice he feels his way forward using all of his limbs, his whole body in fact, before shifting his weight from one foot to the other.**

Støren and the Slingsby glacier

Should of got to this concluding episode eons ago, but better late than never...

5* The Seducer

5* The Conqueror

CR The Discoverer

Brooke Salaz says

I accidentally skipped book two of this trilogy and went straight to this finale. Will probably read the second at some point. Main character Jonas Wergeland is a complex and intriguing mixture of self-centered, egoist but with a lot of self-awareness and recognition of his own flaws. He is the creator of a pioneering Norwegian TV series profiling some of Norway's most accomplished and influential historical and cultural figures. Each of the 20+ episodes of this Thinking Big explored one of these individuals in depth. The narrative moves non-chronologically describing important events in Jonas' life that impacted his world view and the manner in which he decided to express this. Dense and thorough, detailed and engaging. You felt you truly did reach some degree of understanding how this in some ways typical and other ways highly unique, quintessential Norwegian arrived at full consciousness. But where one might appear justified in seeing his life as having run its course through some rather high drama, he himself sees the ending point of the book as a beginning where he recognizes his many mistakes and some accomplishments and sees a freshness in his new vantage point. Recommend if you enjoy dense psychological analysis. I did.

notgettingenough says

Maybe this whole 3 volumes, 1200 pages is a case of beware of low-flying sperm. I won't deny having my suspicion that many years from now I may think I failed a basic IQ test.

But it's now and I don't think that. So this is how to start. Go here and listen to this:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nECoA-...>

The reason we are starting here is that young boy Jonas thinks if there is one thing to take to the extra-terrestrial Vegans to make them think well of human-kind it is this. Jim Reeves singing 'I love you because'. And here on youtube we have no less than Jim Reeves singing 'I love you because' in Oslo on TV there in 1964. Perfect. Listen to it twice. The first time you won't take it seriously, but you should. It is what this book is about.

Not to mention, while you are listening I have a moment to figure out where to go next. Which, now that I think about it, is near the end.

A couple of times lately I've read books that have hurt me. You look at the words on the page and you know you don't want to read them. I'm in Adelaide at the moment and the other day I was with a friend whose husband is in gaol. She's in Australia looking after their four young children. He's in the Californian desert doing six years. It isn't often you listen to somebody's problems and find that they are from some other world altogether. Only to discover, upon a little contemplation, that in some ways they aren't any different from your own. What's she to do with this husband who is doing something that happens to people in gaol where they lose their sense of what is important on the outside and become alienated from their loved ones. I'm watching that happen to somebody at the moment – it doesn't, after all, have to be a physical gaol. But what can you do about it? You can only wait, heartbroken, and hope they come to their senses.

This is only part of her problem. The other part is that she has been waiting for him in every sense for three years and she can't do that anymore. She has decided she has to have sex. And this part of her problem really isn't any easier than the other. Can she do that? And have it just be sex? And still be waiting for this high-flying corporate husband who has joined a prison gang and sports a stab wound, a black eye and an illegal

tattoo at the moment? How do you do this at all, let alone with 4 little kids? She's asking the questions and I'm thinking can I use my ask-the-audience card?

A couple of days later I am having dinner with a friend. The issue has been lying in the air for way too long as to whether we might have sex and finally we take it off the agenda. The simple fact is that we are each waiting for somebody.

It is another day or two later that I read this excruciatingly painful passage.

p. 374

And so he hesitated. And so he refrained from pulling up her skirt and throwing himself on top of her, even when he felt the gentle press of her hands on his back, like an invitation. He tried to excuse himself to her; he wasn't ready, he said, whispered breathlessly.... Still, though, he was afraid – afraid of this lust, afraid that one day, instead of life, a desire to do the right thing, he would make do with a sex life. It was always there, just under the surface....

Later Jonas would contemplate the choice he had made in this and in similar situations. Because what if sex was life? And what if the life in which he might attain the 'lofty goals' toward which he strove was the life of the nether regions?

Where does it come from, this sense that it is right to wait? From the most important relationship of his childhood, from Karen Mohr. Karen, who is alone, but who might not have been. When the young Jonas asks her why she did not take up the invitation to share life with a famous painter she says:

p. 88

'I did not deem him...worthy,' she said. That word 'worthy' was to become a catchword in Jonas's life.

'Did you ever find someone who was worthy?' he asked, doing his best to pronounce the word with the same gravity as Karen Mohr, stretching the vowels, and rolling the 'r'.

'No, I never did.' And then, anticipating Jonas's next question. 'But I have never reproached myself'.

Jonas could not know that many times in the future his eyes would fill with tears at the memory of her face as she spoke of this. She had provided him with a mainstay, one that would stand within him forever; she taught him something about the uncompromising nature of love.... Karen Mohr had received an offer from a man admired by half the world, but had not deemed him worthy. Love is no mere bagatelle, that's for sure, was Jonas's first thought.

So he has this inspiration of a woman in his childhood life and then too he has the astonishing Mr Dehli. Lucky, lucky boy.

p. 216

Mr Dehli was an expert climber; he would venture out onto the thinnest branches of a line of reasoning, then with a sudden swoop come swinging back to the trunk, possibly on a creeper. This, for Jonas, was more thrilling than the trapeze artists at the circus. Frequently he would sit at his desk, following – heart in mouth, almost – their master’s exposition of a complex topic, with one thought leading to another as he scrawled key words and phrases on the board. And just when Jonas was sure that their poor teacher had lost his way completely, when Mr Dehli, with his hair covered in chalk dust and his bow tie woefully askew, was stammering ‘and...and...and...’, suddenly it would come, that blessed ‘but...’, and a sight of relief would run through the classroom, to be followed by the master’s closing triple-somersault of an argument, which he delivered while circling some of the key words and drawing a couple of connecting lines that made Jonas gasp with surprised understanding.

I was so envious of Jonas, as I read about this perfect teacher. I hated every second of school and I’m sitting here thinking why couldn’t I have had a teacher like that? But maybe I did and never realised. Looking back to what I wrote in my thoughts on *The Naked Ape*

I spent a year in Marbury, a non-authoritarian school modelled on Summerhill. It was all too weird for words. Next time you wonder why I don't know what continent Spain is in, or why places that are further away have times that are closer or...keep in mind that my geography text book for the year was *The Naked Ape*.

Well, I say it was that sort of school like it's to blame for my appalling ignorance of geography. If only I'd chosen a normal school instead. But truth be told, the next year I did choose an ordinary school - Methodist Ladies College - and blow me down if the maths teacher didn't turn out to be a girl who made us do things like write poetry. 'Your maths assignment for today is to write a poem in the style of Jabberwocky' It's moot whether my maths is worse than my geography.

Sigh. I wouldn't mind so much if my poetry was any good.

So, maybe I had a Mr Dehli sometime and I simply wasn't worthy. Maybe. I do have half an idea it is really only possible to learn in a good way when it is too late. Or maybe school is just a completely crap way of educating people.

As for the other supremely important relationship of his childhood, that with Bo Wang Lee, well, best you read for yourself. It is lovely.

So there Jonas is, right from the time he is a small boy, wanting life not to be *flat* and finding these people, Karen and Bo and Mr Dehli who most definitely also believe that life is not flat. Eventually he decides to make that his life's work. He decides to reorganise the Dewey classification system into something that has depth. Way to go, Jonas.

Are there not two types of people in the world? The ones who are filers and the ones who aren't? Me, I've always spent my life surrounded by piles of paper feet deep, into which I can dive and find anything at a second's notice. The moment I think about filing anything, I'm lost. A million times in my life, however, I've wanted to file things and how to do it is an insoluble problem. I have thousands of balls of yarn and not a clue how to organise them. By brand? Type? Season? Gauge? Colour? It does my head in. I have a large collection of antique costume jewellery. Do I sort it by what it is: earring here, bracelet there? The colour? The composition? When I might wear it? Where I might wear it? Whether I would *ever* wear it? Mistakes over there? Period? Right now I'm writing recipes on Goodreads and it's happening again. How do I categorise them? According to ingredient, type of course, season, what sort of impact it has on the eater, how it is cooked, cultural origin? I can't do it with something as simple as food and Jonas tries to categorise the whole world as deep as he can. Brilliant.

I was lying in bed last night, contemplating how lucky I was to have been brought up in a family who didn't think life was a flat thing. My father is dying and it would be such a pity, such unlike his life, if his death is going to be flat. I hope not. Just a week ago I was all but irritated with him as he was telling me about how he had been proposing to my mother's - his wife's - sister who has been a nun for merely 50 years. Last night I was thinking that yes, this is his way of making sure life even now, even completely incapacitated and not able to read or write, of making sure that life is not flat. I should have been more gracious than I was about the idea. A bigamist who turned a devoted nun away from the Church. Certainly not flat, that idea, that ambition.

And then later this morning, he dies. Never a flat life, not for one moment.

How to classify things. Of course, most recently, these thoughts here. I have no idea how to lay them out. Not the foggiest.

I could talk about this book forever. What I would like to do, while I still have some close sense of it is to post this now, not being sure when I will get to more of it...Sorry. The book/trilogy is worthy of much more.

Alan says

updated Aug 23rd 2012

not quite currently reading, but about to, when my holiday begins (tomorrow).

..reading on Woolacombe beach, or when it's too wet or foggy in the apartment above W. beach. So glad I bought my iPod cuz I needed to listen to 'Rubber Soul' while reading, and of course have all the Beatles including most bootlegs on it. Even listened to Michelle and What Goes On which I normally skip. Of course 'Girl', 'The Word', and especially 'Norwegian Wood' are the most relevant tracks in relation to this book. George's 'If I Needed Someone' is my fave at the moment.

..nearly finished, well 100 pages to go, and might slow down now as holiday (and opportunity to read) over. Enjoying it greatly, the first section just took my breath away. Have a couple of issues with it, one is repetition - not sure how many times I need to be told that 'Thinking Big' is the greatest programme (or set of programmes) on earth - I think I've gathered that by now. I do like the way it circles around and around key events though, mirroring his attempts at a new way of thinking. And, as a librarian I know exactly what he means about the rigid and rather dumb - well 19th century - Dewey classification system. However in a physical library books have to sit somewhere, and not everywhere. On the net though that's a different matter, and it becomes obvious that the net *is* Jonas's system in action! The other (slight) problem I have is

one I'm not sure I can talk about without giving the plot away... I'll think about that. Proper review coming once I finish these last 100 pages.

...finished, a magnificent book, a proper end to the trilogy. More later...

Later (Aug 23rd) - as many/Manny have/has said it's difficult to review this great book/trilogy, because when you're asked what it's about (and I was and spluttered, a TV producer, Norway...) you have to say (as Manny says) 'everything' (I did). I've read several other reviews too (M's, Not's, Karen's etc) and feel it's difficult to add much, so instead these are notes rather than a proper review (what a cop out).

Jonas: he's well informed, gifted and full of insight into history and Norway's place in the world, its heroes and their contributions but he's not terribly bright sometimes when it comes to those closest to him – e.g. Bo's revelation comes as a complete shock to him, and he misunderstands Margrete, his wife (although – possibly – she isn't the easiest of characters to understand). He accepts his punishment for this, he feels his obtuseness did kill his wife, and therefore he is guilty of murder. Besides he uses the time inside like a monk would, to contemplate and research (it all sounds very nice in fact). But overall the book is dazzling, brilliant and like the juggler (Bo) keeps so many balls in the air you have to admire the skill.

The overall theme – that we are still evolving, maybe most of all in 'love': the way love works and our understanding of it, to the extent of evolving a new organ, (here new kinds of lungs) maybe a new sense – is one fairly common from the 60s and 70s (Doris Lessing for example at the end of her Martha Quest series and 'Briefing for a Descent into Hell'; or the hippy movement). But Kjaerstad excels in bringing it to life on both an epic and a personal scale, both world wide and intimate. The idea is that if layers of meaning and/or imagery (of all kinds) could be apprehended (and comprehended) at the same time this would be the key to the next stage of mankind. Through an ability to watch/listen/read things simultaneously we would reach the point of becoming new kinds of beings. We are too compartmentalised, like the Dewey system or the way subjects are divided up in our education system, we need to combine and experiment, to see what will happen, like the teacher who combines two elements in a test tube and then introduces a third (the catalyst) to show how something new will result, so we need to do that in life – combine the unexpected, go beyond the predicatable.

Here so much is brought together – crystals, butterflies, aliens, semen, maps, music, breath, fjords, history, childhood escapades and embarrassments and love and nurture and eccentric aunts and uncles (but then here everyone is eccentric, unique), the Beatles and Bach, archery and TV quiz shows, architecture and deck chairs.

Some great moments, perhaps the best being when his daughter watches all of her father's programmes simultaneously on screens that surround her and feels they connect to one another to make something new and change the viewer, not just momentarily but for life.

Wergeland also realises that the new internet generation may already be on the path to this new way of thinking/being because of the way the net organises knowledge, constantly linking through to other areas regardless of subject. This has been mooted as a bad thing, giving us a wide but shallow knowledge pool instead of the depth a narrower approach can give us, but Jonas seems to see the good in it, if used properly, as with TV. He (or maybe Kjaerstad) also warns against complacency; is always attempting to chafe and invigorate his countryman in particular and us in general (eg the admonishments on the use of Stressless chair in front of the telly: a bad use of the medium).

This third book overall is about reconciliation, knowledge and love. Jonas has learned from his mistakes at

last, and is entering a new phase. It is like one of Shakespeare's late plays in its scope and generosity.

So thanks Manny et al for putting me onto a book (set of books) I'd have otherwise missed.

karen says

as the kids say: OMFG.

i am sitting here, stunned BY A BOOK!! it's like all of a sudden, everything in my life makes sense. although, it was probably a good idea to take a break to read *under the dome* right in the middle of this trilogy. i was, quite frankly, getting a little sick of jonas wergeland, and the pause was useful in giving me some much-needed space from his claustrophobic life. plus, the contrast certainly did not hurt kjaerstad. it's just that jonas wergeland is a character packed to the tits (sometimes *with* tits) with anecdotes and events and prophecies and weighted moments and perfectly-stated sentences and adoring masses. it was just too full of... stuff. and it's not that i want to read about his downtime, but it is truly exhausting to read so much thick and meaningful prose, where every sentence has weight and resonance. it is wonderful but it makes the head spin with excitement and emotional overload. a little goes a long way.

and by now, in the trilogy, you have become accustomed to the flow of ideas; one story leaching into another in a more-concrete-than-stream-of-consciousness-but-still-unexpected-association kind of way. but oh, god - so many parts of this book: the longest, most woefully nostalgic kiss of all time, margrete's relationship to reading and books-as-objects, missed opportunities, samarkand... so many moments of, yes, discovery.

but i still need someone to tackle writing that chronology. even with all the contradictions, which are necessary because of the nature of these three books, maybe some kind of three-pronged timeline - just to see it all at once... this is very packed storytelling, like proust but less willfully verbose, less languid, and more overtly erotic. at the end i was creating distractions (mostly involving goodreads.com) just so i wouldn't get to the end too quickly.

there are so many bookmarks in this copy - so many quotes i was going to transfer into this review, but i just can't. because again, and i seriously regret what i am about to say - this book needs to be *discovered* by the reader. it is the culmination of two book's worth of reading that becomes (mostly) crystallized in this concluding work. and it is so fucking worth it! there are some jaw-droppingly good moments in this third one. this is an astonishing book. i want to copy pages 230-232 and just read them every day, for example... i started typing every quote i liked out onto this, but they lose their impact when taken out of the whole. no one goes to the museum to look at a dinosaur's shin bone.

a seriously good book will flash with energy that reminds you of other things you like; layers and layers of association and self-reflection, and this one, for me, had moments of following (the movie), infinite jest, and one big-time tess/angel clare moment. even though tess is my least favorite hardy, parts of it still have his genius, and the echo in this book is heartbreaking and perfect and made me wish books could make me cry.

[and i don't know what greg is talking about but buddha is a character with as much screen-time as johnny horne in twin peaks. or michael k. williams in *the hulk* (okay, that's not fair - michael k. williams in *miracle*

at st. anna) sheesh. i kept wondering if i was missing something. but no i am not.:]

i am just wagging my little doggy tail right now and not really saying anything - is it okay to just use review-space to gush?

i have nothing to say about this book because it says everything.
please have your own trilogy month.

Ina says

I finally finished that book which took me sooo long. Not that it was boring. The truth is that it was a really sophisticated read, a complex story for a complex main character, nothing you should skim through after a stressful day. This book is about love, every shades and aspects of love you can imagine. Great, but difficult to read (and 'digest').

Madhuri says

Discoverer is a remarkable book - one I got myself completely taken with. It is the final part of a trilogy, and though reading the last part of the trilogy before you have read the prequels may not be the prescribed order, the book stands alone on its own so that it does not become a handicap.

The book is about Jonas Wergeland, an elusive character, who is a TV-genius, responsible for some remarkable shows on Norwegian television. He comes back from a trip one day to find his wife dead. He is tried for the murder and he confesses to the crime. The fall of a celebrity is much loved by people, and this fall brings about two books on Jonas' life. One is written by Kamala Varma – a famous Indian author under whom Jonas is now working as a secretary, and another is a biography 'staged' by Jonas's sister Rakel – these two books form part 1 and 2 of this trilogy. In the third and the final part, we hear Jonas' own voice giving his version of the story. (Though there is another narrator interspersed with Jonas, someone whose identity is not revealed till the end, like the other two books - but a narrator who is easy to guess)

This account is remarkable in its reminiscence. Jonas' account moves from one memory to another through a tenuous link, and he has not finished narrating one story before he reaches the other, and suddenly you find yourself into tunnels of stories. You have to keep track of which tunnel you are in, and then when you get out there is the other original unfinished story, which is capsuled in another one. The stories themselves are so full of thoughts and ideas, and you wonder if Jonas could have lived through so many thoughts when he was 12, or 7.

The book is about discovery – of self, of past, of memories and also of those beautiful regions of Norway which Jonas and his team is traversing on a ship. Jonas seems to be a boy wonder of sorts, but also seems to have so many moments of failing, disappointment which constantly plague him about his self-worth. What I have read so far seems like a coming of age story, though the part where the 'coming' happens has remained elusive. Perhaps it happens with Magrete's death. But before that happens, there is much meditation – on films, on music, on sports and all the things a growing up is wound up in.
