Discussion of Sigrid Undset’s

*Tilbake til Fremtiden* *(Return to the Future, 1942)*:

- Written in Brooklyn in 1942, first published in English. Americans as intended audience.
- Undset’s position as intellectual and writer in Norway (anti-Nazist writing) forced her to flee Norway in April 1940. Fled northward as German troops advanced from the South, to Swedish border.

*Is this travel narrative and “memoir” also a anti-German polemic?*

- A “master narrative” of Norwegian people (peaceful history; meager existence; rugged conditions) in National Romantic tradition?

Other themes

- Victims of war: her care of Finnish refugee children
- Ridiculousness of NS members
“Conspiracy” and betrayal by “Friendly Germans”

(Wienerbarn – Wandervögel)

self-proclaimed Anti-Nazi position (p. 25)

Norwegian desire to fight (p. 28, we can look Finns in the eyes); personal sacrifice of son, Anders

Swedish (armed) neutrality; Swedish desires (p. 64)

German Hysteria/Hitler worship/screaming animals/ugliness (p. 77-78)

Concludes with mention of Swedish “transport agreement.”

Discussion questions:

1. Compare and contrast this 1942 work, to Karen Blixen’s “Letters from a Land at War.” Undset typecasts the invading Germans as “vermin” and “animals”; Blixen describes them as “religious zealots.” Compare the contexts for these representations, contrast the authors’ narrative strategies.

2. Consider the intended audience for “Return to the Future,” relative again to Blixen’s text.

3. Work with definitions of “polemic” and “propaganda.” Where does one draw the line between the two terms?