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## SUMMARY OF *KUNSTVÆRKET* (THE WORK OF ART)

In 1543, the Polish mathematician Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543) published his theory that had occupied the most of his life, that the Sun is at the centre of the planetary system and that the Earth is one of the planets. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, this heliocentric model was largely ignored in favor of the standard Earth-centered or geocentric model.

Copernicus's most important detractor was the Dane Tycho Brahe (1546-1601). He was born in Scania to an aristocratic family and studied in Germany where in Rostock he lost the tip of his nose in a duel. When he returned to Denmark he settled near his birthplace. He studied the New Star or supernova of 1572 and the following year he published a book about it that made him world-famous. The Danish king Frederic II (1534-1588) then offered him the island of Hven in the strait of Øresund between Zealand and Scania, where he built an observatory and the castle Uraniborg. Tycho lived there from 1576 till 1597.

When Frederic II died in 1588, his eldest son Christian (1577-1648) was only 11 years old. After eight years of regency, the prince was crowned as Christian IV. Soon thereafter, Tycho was sued for blasphemy and other crimes and left Denmark permanently. In Latin poems written abroad, he proclaimed that "Dania" was been "ungrateful" for the fame he had brought to "her" and on a painting he explained that he was pleased to recover "freedom after a long exile in his father-land". At the end of his life he did not feel like a Dane anymore.

In 1599, Tycho came to Bohemia and worked for some time with the mathematician Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), who was, however, an advocate of the Copernican system. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of October 1601, Tycho and the imperial counselor Ehrenfried von Minckwitz (c. 1545-1615) took part in a banquet offered by Baron Peter von Rosenberg (1539-1611) in his palace in Prague. At this banquet, Tycho suddenly became ill. After eleven days of suffering from urine problems and a fever, he died in his own house near the palace. Kepler was appointed to succeed him as imperial mathematician, and several years later, he made seminal advances in heliocentric astronomy, but in the first years of the 17<sup>th</sup> century he was not one of the principal astronomers yet.

Soon after Tycho's death, his geocentric model was criticized in Denmark. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 1602, the newly-appointed Danish professor of physics Jon Jakobsen (c. 1555-1608) held a conference on astronomy at the University of Copenhagen in the presence of the king. He praised Copernicus as a god and made a fool of Tycho without naming him. Thus, Denmark was symbolically the first country in the world to support the Copernican Revolution.

Thereafter for half a century, Hven was a forbidden territory. When the first foreign observer was permitted to visit the island after the king's death, there was not a single brick left of either Uraniborg or the observatory. Danish scholars theorize that peasants razed the buildings. They unanimously glorify Christian IV and accuse Tycho of having neglected his duties as vassal and of having been arrogant toward the king.

## **First Part: Changing Speculations (pp. 9-131)**

### From Burial to Burst Bladder (1601-1991)

Tycho's disease has been described by only three contemporaries: by the Silesian surgeon Jan Jessenius (1566-1621) in his funeral oration held in the Týn Church on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1601 and printed shortly after; by Kepler in a note added at the end of Tycho's observation journal and published in 1618; and by the young physician Johannes Wittich (1575-c. 1641) in a diary unpublished until 1876 and largely unknown until 1955. Jessenius and Kepler speak only of urine retention, but Wittich diagnoses the disease as a consequence of a burst bladder. The first printed mention of this seems to be in a medical textbook published in 1847 by the Austrian physician Joseph Hyrtl (1810-1894) and soon known all over the world. Yet, the burst bladder theory was not generally known until Milan Kundera mentioned it in *The Immortality* in 1990. According to the rumor retold by the Czech exile writer, Tycho caused his own death by being too polite to ask for permission to urinate during a dinner party with the emperor. This version mostly likely originates from Hyrtl's textbook. On the basis of the burst bladder theory, Kundera referred to the astronomer as the most ridiculous immortal of all time, which has increased Tycho's renown. The astronomer has always been one of the most famous persons ever born in Denmark, but until Kundera's book his international notoriety was not as important as it is today.

### From Burst Bladder to Auto-Medication (1991-2004)

In the 1990's, beard and hair exhumed from Tycho's grave was analyzed by scientists in Denmark and Sweden. They found traces of mercury in both beard and hair. Scholars consequently dismissed the burst bladder theory, thinking instead that the illness at the dinner party was caused by prostate hypertrophy. In the astronomer's own writings, they found a recipe for an elixir against skin diseases that contained mercury. Unanimously, Danish scholars stated that in the hope of relieving his urinary problems, Tycho took his own self-made medicine and that an overdose caused his death. They often made a fool of him, presenting him as a coward who was terrified by the idea of having a catheter introduced through the penis to relieve the full bladder. However, one medical expert Bent Kæmpe advanced a murder theory. He suspected that Tycho was poisoned by Kepler's wife.

### From Auto-Medication to Murder (2004-2009)

In 2004, the American couple Ann-Lee and Joshua Gilder published *Heavenly Intrigue*, in which they dismissed the auto-medication theory as totally unlikely and sought a new culprit. They settled on Johannes Kepler whom they suspected of poisoning his superior in order to obtain his journal of observations that Kepler needed in order to advance his work. The American book became a best-seller and was translated into German, but it encountered skepticism both in scientific circles and in Denmark.

In 2005, the Danish professor Peter Andersen (Vinilandicus) suspected Christian IV of having hired a contract killer against Tycho, but he was prevented from publishing his murder theory in Denmark. At the same time, the Copenhagen National Museum put out a book about Tycho that presented his departure from Denmark as voluntary and his death as accidental.

Andersen published his theory abroad in German and held conferences in different European countries on the Danish renaissance. In December 2008, he went to Prague to reveal the content of a diary written in code by the Swedish count Erik Brahe (1552-1614), a distant cousin of the astronomer. The Swede's notes show that he was sent to Prague by some rela-

tive of the Danish king in order to kill Tycho. In January 2009 in one of the largest local newspapers, a leading Danish authority on Tycho dismissed Andersen's statements as "mad theory" and "100 % nonsense".

## **Second Part: Divine Glimpses (pp. 135-276)**

*Hamlet* (1600-1601)

Some months before Tycho's death, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) wrote *Hamlet*. Scholars have been unable to find a convincing interpretation of this puzzling masterpiece. In the play, the Danish king is killed by his brother Claudius with a poison that "swift as quicksilver courses through the natural gates and alleys of the body" (I,5). The murderer usurps the throne of Denmark and marries his predecessor's wife Gertrude. As a ghost, the former king comes back to Elsinore and calls on his son Hamlet to avenge his death. The young prince hesitates and lets players present a play *The Murder of Gonzago* in the presence of Claudius in order to trap him. Finally Hamlet kills the usurper with poison, but is poisoned himself. Before dying, he begs his counselor Horatio to tell the world how things happened. After Hamlet's death, Fortinbras enters, having just concluded a strange campaign in Poland.

Since 1996, the astronomer Peter Usher has interpreted the play as an allegory for the competition between the cosmological models of the contemporaries Thomas Digges (1546-1595) and Tycho. Digges was the first and most important English heliocentric scientist. Usher understands Shakespeare's unnamed "Polack" as a cipher for Copernicus and the final scene as a victory for the heliocentric model. Usher relates the usurper's name to Claudius Ptolemy who invented the geocentric model. He thinks furthermore that *The Murder of Gonzago* does not symbolize Claudius' past killing of the former king, but Hamlet's intent to kill his uncle.

Usher's interpretation is compatible with Danish history if we regard Tycho as the unofficial king of Denmark during the eight years of regency. That means that the astronomer is represented by Claudius, the crown prince Christian by Hamlet, Frederic II by the ghost and Christian's mother Sophie of Mecklenburg (1557-1631) by Gertrude. In 1571, this German woman was forced into an incestuous marriage with her Danish cousin at the age of 14. At that time, Frederic II was 37 and had a Danish mistress that he was not allowed to marry. According to ancestral custom, Danish monarchs never mix their blood with native inhabitants. Because of the seven children they begat, Frederic's and Sophie's marriage is always presented as an idyll by Danish historians, but strong evidence indicates that a contemporaneous rumor spoke of a love affair between Sophie and Tycho. If this rumor is true, Denmark has been governed by bastards for almost three hundred years.

Horatio's work

If Claudius is to be identified with the geocentric astronomer, Elsinore means Hven and not the city of Helsingør which is 15 km north-north-west of the island. In fact Shakespeare's landscape descriptions fit Hven perfectly, for this island has "dreadful cliffs" (I,4) and is situated next to a "high eastward hill" (I,1). The location of Claudius' castle on "the hill of heaven" (II,2) is an reference to Uraniborg's position on the peak of H[ea]ven. Therefore, Elsinore might mean "Els[ewhere]inore[sund]". The writing Elsinore is found nowhere before *Hamlet*.

Horatio is the teller of the whole story and his name is a reference to one of Jon Jakobsen's surnames. This Danish humanist asserted that he was born on Hven. In 1595, he adopted the surname Venusinus as homage: to his island, to the goddess of love and beauty, to the

planet Venus, and to Horace. The Roman poet was born in Venusia and stated that one of his ancestors was called Venusinus. This legendary Italian threw away his sword in order to fight with his stiletto. In the same way, Jakobsen fought with his feather. Until 1600, this Dane worked as pastor in Copenhagen, but he was also a poet. In the early 1590's, he came to visit Tycho on Hven at least twice. After his first visit, he wrote several panegyric poems to the astronomer. Tycho was flattered and published two of them.

After Christian IV's crowning, Jakobsen broke with the astronomer and became the king's mentor, just like Horatio in *Hamlet*. The Dane had contacts with humanists throughout Europe and somehow established contacts to the small circle of heliocentricists in England to which Digges and (according to Usher) Shakespeare belonged. The third great English supporter of Copernicus was the philosopher John Dee (1527-1608). He wrote several books about hermetic philosophy based on the statement that "all wisdom is in Mercury". Mercury is the Latin name for Hermes Trismegistus, literally the "thrice great Hermes". As homage to the legendary founder of hermetic philosophy, Jakobsen adopted a second surname and called himself Mercurius. In a letter sent to Bohemia at the end of 1599, Tycho's sister Sophie related a conversation she had had with Mercurius in Scania. This man had made her believe that her brother risked losing his appointment as imperial mathematician in Prague. In his answers sent to Denmark, the astronomer vilified Mercurius for his unfaithfulness and his propensity to change identity, by which Tycho was referring to Jakobsen having become the king's secret counselor.

Jakobsen is widely unknown in his home country. According to ancient rumor he sold his soul to the devil in exchange of high appointments and success. He is Denmark's Faust. In 1600, he gave up his church and was suddenly named professor at the university on the personal recommendation of the king. He took over a chair after the suspicious death of Anders Krag (1553-1600), one of Tycho's few Danish friends. This man became ill after some events in a laboratory and he might have been poisoned deliberately.

In every respect, Jakobsen was a controversial person. He was against Lutheran exorcism, wanted to reform Danish orthography by introducing two new letters, wrote poems under female identity, called Denmark's national historian Saxo a liar, dreamt of a democratic republic similar to that of ancient Athena and hoped that his utopia would one day come true through a plebeian revolution. In 1603, he presented his political project in a coded fairy-tale called commonly *The Chronicle of Hven*. The exact title is *About Hven between Zealand and Scania*. It deals with evil-minded giants fighting each other for a treasure hidden on Tycho's island. In the end, there is only one giant left and he is killed by the rebelling population who longed for freedom and peace. The title alludes to the fight between Tycho from Scania and Christian from Zealand, which is the most important personal conflict in Danish history. Hven symbolizes the plebeian Jakobsen himself. He was unwillingly caught in the cold war between declining aristocracy and growing royal power. He wrote the plot for *Hamlet* and sent it somehow to England, perhaps through the musician John Dowland (1563-1626) who about 1600 worked as a spy at the court of Copenhagen. In the darkness around Elsinore, Horatio stresses that his person is not there, only "a piece of him" (I,1). This piece is *Hamlet*.

#### *Urania Titani* (1600-1601)

In 1668, a poem of exactly 600 verses was published in Copenhagen under the title *Urania Titani* (From Urania to Titan). The original manuscript was later found at the National Library of Vienna among Tycho's papers. The poem is a Latin letter in Ovid's style. It is sent by the pining Urania to her lover Titan who went to Germany and Venice to find gold and promised to be back before the sun reached Aries. Urania is sad because the sun has now been through this astrological sign several times. She tells her friend about a laboratory accident

and warns him against the “deceitful mercury”. She reminds him of her young son and invites Titan to come back to practice alchemy with her in order to create another little gold nugget in her womb. She tells moreover about a close friend’s death, but does not reveal his name. In the last line, Urania wishes Titan good-bye.

Danish scholars consider these 600 verses to be the most important Latin poem ever written in their country. They think Tycho wrote it in his sister’s name. She was actually in love with a Danish alchemist, and we know from her correspondence that they called each other Urania and Titan. To escape from his creditors, the alchemist went to Germany in 1592 and Sophie did not see him again until the end of 1599. Three years later, they married and lived in poverty. Because of the length of Titan’s absence in Urania’s letter, the poem is commonly dated to 1594, and in that year one of Sophie Brahe’s and the alchemist’s good friends actually died.

In the original manuscripts of *Urania Titani* and *The Chronicle of Hven*, we find a characteristic flourish which looks like the letter V. It is Jakobsen’s secret signature for Venusinus. The heliocentric humanist is in fact the real author of the poem. At a glance, Urania is Sophie Brahe, but after deeper examination the lonely writer of the letter is the widow queen Sophie. Titan is the alchemist Tycho who went away from Denmark in 1597 leaving his royal mistress alone in order to find gold in Bohemia. Titan’s Venice is Benatky, where Tycho stayed for several months in 1600 before returning to Prague. Benatky is the Czech name for Venice. The laboratory accident and the anonymous friend who dies in the letter is Jakobsen’s predecessor Anders Krag, who in June 1600 in Copenhagen died from accidental or deliberate poisoning. Urania’s young son is the king Christian IV who never did find out which of Frederic II or Tycho was his father. The celebrated question that Hamlet asks himself is related to the first and last letters in the astronomer’s name: “T[ych]o B[rah]e or not T[ych]o B[rah]e” (III,1) means to be or not to be the son of the astronomer, but also to be or not to be supporter of his geocentric model. Urania stresses curiously that she has written exactly 600 verses and this number secretly alludes to the year 1600 in which the internal chronology of the poem begins. This chronology ends on the first day of Pisces, i.e. the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 1601.

In the following summer, Jakobsen alias Venusinus, Mercurius, Horatio and Urania, sent his poem to Prague. He wanted to take a poetic leave of the man he had worshipped as a god in the beginning of the 1590’s. The self-assured killer warned Tycho against the deceitful mercury and knew that the astronomer would not understand the hint, until it was too late. He was teasing his prey like a “hawk”. Jakobsen is one of the young “eyases” that Hamlet knows from a handsaw (II,2).

In his early poems, Jakobsen glorified Tycho as a redeemer of the entire Humanity. After 1597, he despised him as a coward because the astronomer preferred exile instead of overthrowing the dangerous king who led Denmark to disaster. During Christian IV’s reign, Denmark, where “something is rotten” (I,4), was invaded twice. At the king’s death, the country was economically ruined and territorially reduced. Today, only 9 % is left of the former Danish empire.

*Hamlet*, *Urania Titani* and *The Chronicle of Hven* form a trilogy written by the hermetic poet Jakobsen. This unpredictable Mercurius wanted to be the “thrice great Hermes”, great in the three languages English, Latin and Danish, and great in the three genres theater, poetry and prose. In *Hamlet* and *Urania Titani*, both written before Tycho’s death, Jakobsen announces in advance that mercury will kill the astronomer. In the play, Claudius is killed by “a poison tempered by himself” (V,2). This poison must be the same as the one used against Old Hamlet, i.e. mercury. In *The Mousetrap*, cosmological and geographic references make clear that the murder will take place in Prague in October 1601.

### **Third Part: Melancholic Testimonies (pp. 279-398)**

*This part deals with Erik Brahe's diary and is largely a deepening of conferences held in Prague in December 2008 and in Copenhagen in January 2009.*

#### From Treachery to Forgiveness (January 1600 – August 1600)

During the Swedish civil war, the Catholic count Erik Brahe passively supported the king Sigismund (1566-1632) against the rebelling duke Charles (1550-1611). After the defeat of the royal camp and in spite of his treachery, the count was appointed the main judge at the trial of Linköping. Unwillingly, he sentenced the chancellor Erik Sparre (1550-1600) to death in order to be reconciled with the victorious duke. The chancellor's death is echoed in *Hamlet* where the prince of Denmark is ready to "defy augury". He says that the "fall of a sparrow" does not scare him (V,2). The Swedish "sparrow" was Erik Brahe's brother-in-law. Jakobsen knew that if the count could bring himself to commit this betrayal against his close relative, he could also be coerced to poison his distant cousin in Bohemia that he had never met. After the trial of Linköping, Erik Brahe regained duke Charles' mercy and hoped that he could spend the rest of his life in peace in his Swedish castle in the middle of the lake of Vättern.

#### From Escape to Conspiracy (August 1600 – May 1601)

After the blood-shed of Linköping that took place on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 1600, the Danish assassination plot was put into motion. For his help in the conspiracy, Christian IV promised his uncle duke Hans of Holstein (1545-1622) the kingdom of Livonia. This was Jakobsen's idea, but the king's work. In the summer of 1600, duke Hans sent a letter to Erik Brahe warning him against duke Charles. In August, the count suddenly left his Swedish possessions and met duke Hans' son at the Danish border. Erik Brahe continued his escape to Danzig, hoping to be reconciled with king Sigismund who had only his Polish kingdom left. In Danzig, the Swedish count met duke Hans several times and was informed of king Sigismund's disgrace. This disgrace was caused by two Danish diplomats sent to Warsaw at the beginning of 1601. One of the two diplomats died shortly after his return to Denmark. He was Anders Krag's elder brother and also the king's personal historiographer. After the diplomat's death, Jakobsen was appointed as his successor. In April 1601, duke Hans ordered Erik Brahe to go to Prague.

#### From Scruples to Funeral Feast (May 1601 – December 1601)

In May 1601, the count reached the imperial capital. There he had contacts with Scandinavian Jesuits. They worked under the orders of an optimistic Norwegian leader who hoped that Denmark could be won back from the Protestants. In a report sent to Rome, he referred to secret Catholics at the University of Copenhagen and meant primarily Jakobsen. In 1606, the Norwegian Jesuit came to Denmark in order to raise a popular Catholic rebellion. He was then betrayed by Jakobsen who had never been supporting either Luther or the pope and who in fact was an atheist. A Danish politician once warned him not to be as weak in his beliefs as his biblical namesake Jonah.

In June 1601, Erik Brahe and duke Hans met again in Teplice, after which they returned to Prague and were received in audience by the emperor Rudolph II (1552-1612) himself. In July, they negotiated with him in turns almost every day for more than a week. During these negotiations, the Swedish count met the astronomer for the first time. His diary notes prove

that he had serious troubles with his conscience about this meeting. The scruples began shortly after his first arrival in Prague in May.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 1601, Erik Brahe invited the astronomer together with Minckwitz for a private dinner party somewhere in Prague. According to Kepler's note, the two guests went together to Rosenberg's banquet two days later. That day, Erik Brahe only wrote that he was "unable" to do something. This note seems to prove that Minckwitz poisoned the astronomer without Erik Brahe's participation. After the beginning of the illness, the Swedish count handed out a secret report to the emperor, and afterwards went to Tycho's house where he stayed until the cousin's death. On the basis of the diary, it cannot be determined whether the astronomer died from the consequences of Minckwitz' poisoning or from a second poisoning in his own house.

During the funeral procession, Erik Brahe and Minckwitz walked behind the coffin with the astronomer's youngest son between them. Some days later, they "divided" something, probably their salary. At the end of December, Erik Brahe left Prague and in spring 1602 in Danzig he again met several times with duke Hans. At the end of October, they wrote several letters to each other, perhaps on the occasion of the first anniversary of Tycho's death.

### **Epilogue: Unprejudiced imaginary ideas (pp. 401-425)**

The author admits that he cannot present juridical evidence proving either his murder theory or the hypothesis that Tycho was Christian IV's father. He has only evidence for the existence of the rumor. Frederic II probably confirmed this rumor publicly himself in his device "Treue ist Wildpret" (Fidelity is [as difficult to catch as] venison). Furthermore, queen Sophie had her seven children within ten years, but stopped becoming pregnant once for two and a half years while the astronomer left Denmark to seek a patron. Finally a Danish novel about Alexander the Great was censured in 1584. It was dedicated personally to the seven-year-old crown prince, and invited him to follow in the conqueror's footsteps. In the novel, Alexander is the son of an Egyptian magician and astronomer who has many similarities with Tycho. For example, he seduces the queen in the absence of king Philip of Macedonia.

Some evidence suggests that Christian IV was not even queen Sophie's child, but a changeling put into the real prince's cradle in April 1577. In *The Chronicle of Hven*, the giant symbolizing Christian IV is a changeling and this theme is also present in *Hamlet* (V,2). According to his own statement, Tycho was himself a changeling. In one of his books, he explained that he was "kidnapped" by his uncle and his aunt without the knowledge of his biological parents. At Christian's birth, Tycho's kidnapping aunt was the lady-in-waiting at the court and her main task was to take care of the new-born crown prince. She could easily have exchanged him against the boy that her adoptive son had just begat in Scania with a peasant's daughter.

### **Index of literature (pp. 427-438)**

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### **Key dates (p. 450)**

### **Key explanations (p. 451)**

<b><i>Hamlet</i></b>	<b>At a glance</b>	<b><i>After deeper examination</i></b>
Place:	Helsingør	<i>Hven</i>
Time:	Remote past	<i>1588-1601</i>
Hamlet:	Danish prince	<i>Christian IV before Tycho's death</i>
Fortinbras:	Norwegian prince	<i>Christian IV after Tycho's death</i>
Claudius:	Hamlet's uncle	<i>Tycho</i>
The Ghost:	Hamlet's father	<i>Frederic II</i>
Gertrude:	Hamlet's mother	<i>Widow queen Sophie</i>
Marcellus:	Hamlet's friend	<i>Jakobsen before censorship and surname change</i>
Horatio:	Hamlet's counselor	<i>Jakobsen after censorship and surname change</i>
Rosencrantz/Guildenstern:	Claudius' friends	<i>Holger Rosenkrantz</i>
Francisco/Barnardo:	Claudius' guardians	<i>Frans Tengnagel</i>
The Polack:	Claudius' enemies	<i>Copernicus</i>
<b><i>Mousetrap</i></b>	<b>At a glance</b>	<b><i>After deeper examination</i></b>
Place:	Vienna	<i>Prague</i>
Time:	16 <sup>th</sup> century	<i>October 1601</i>
Gonzago:	Hamlet's father	<i>Claudius</i>
Baptista:	Gertrude	<i>Gertrude</i>
Lucianus:	Claudius	<i>Hamlet</i>
<b><i>Urania Titani</i></b>	<b>At a glance</b>	<b><i>After deeper examination</i></b>
Place:	Eriksholm, Scania	<i>Uraniborg</i>
Time:	1594	<i>11.04.1600-11.02.1601</i>
Urania:	Sophie Brahe	<i>Widow queen Sophie (+ Jakobsen)</i>
Titan:	Erik Lange	<i>Tycho</i>
Tago:	Tage Thott	<i>Christian IV</i>
Bangus:	Peder Bang	<i>Sound of explosion</i>
Apollo:	Tycho	<i>Jakobsen</i>
Hermes:	Hermes Trismegistus	<i>Jakobsen</i>
Mercurius:	Planet and god Mercury	<i>Jakobsen</i>
Nisus and Eurialus:	Mythological friends	<i>Anders and Niels Krag</i>
Titan's dead friend:	Falk Gøye	<i>Anders Krag</i>
Titan's servant:	Mikkel	<i>Longomontanus</i>
Titan's accident:	Schönburg	<i>Hven</i>
Titan's destination:	Venice	<i>Benatky</i>
<b><i>Chronicle of Hven</i></b>	<b>At a glance</b>	<b><i>After deeper examination</i></b>
Place:	Hven	<i>Denmark</i>
Time:	Remote past	<i>-1572-1603-</i>
Nøgling:	Treasure owner	
Hogen:	Nøgling's son	
Chremild:	Nøgling's daughter	
Sigfrid Horn:	Chremild's husband	
Gluna:	Hogen's wife	
Hvenild:	Female servant	
Ranche:	Hogen's and Hvenild's son	<i>Christian IV</i>
Karl Høfde:	Hogen's and Gluna's son	