

AASTA MARIE BJORVAND BJØRKØY AND STÅLE DINGSTAD:

Litterære kretsløp. Bidrag til en norsk bokhistorie fra Maurits Hansen til Gunvor Hofmo.

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The aim of this substantial volume, as the authors claim on the back cover, is to examine canonical works of Norwegian literature from an unusual perspective; whilst traditional literary histories have concentrated on the stories *in* books, they are focusing on the stories *about* books. Attention will be devoted to the writing, publishing, distribution, readership and critical reception of the works, and their subsequent evolution through revisions, cuts, additions, censorship, translation and adaptation.

This is an ambitious undertaking, and might indeed be called something of an overstatement, for this is not a literary history, but a series of case studies of individual authors. It does not trace the broad outlines of literary development and the position of each writer within that framework. What it does very effectively, on the other hand, is to present illuminating analyses of the ways in which central writers have been involved with all the machinery of book production. Ståle Dingstad is the author of the first half of the volume, which deals with the nineteenth century and has chapters on Maurits Hansen, Asbjørnsen and Moe, Camilla Collett, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Henrik Ibsen, Arne

Garborg, Amalie Skram and Knut Hamsun; Aasta Marie Bjorvand Bjørkøy has written the second half about the twentieth century, with case studies of Olav Duun, Cora Sandel, Aksel Sandemose, Tarjei Vesaas, Thorbjørn Egner, Olav H. Hauge and Gunvor Hofmo.

The most important function of this volume, as the authors stress repeatedly, is that it demonstrates that a literary work is a process rather than a product; many of the most treasured milestones of Norwegian literature have been through several incarnations, to the extent that different readers might be reading quite different texts. Some authors undertake their own revisions; the changes Camilla Collett made to *Amtmandens Døttre* (1854-55) for its third edition in 1879, together with its new Preface, changed it from being a work of romantic nostalgia to a more realistic and feminist text. Olav H. Hauge revised all seven of his collections of poems, and went on revising them even after his *Dikt i samling* appeared in 1994, so that the reader needs to be aware which edition of *Dikt i samling* she is reading. Sometimes revisions were undertaken by others, with or without the author's consent. Cora Sandel's *Bare Alberte* (1939) was censored when it was republished in occupied Norway in 1941, with passages which revealed the author's political engagement and foresight about the coming conflict being excised. It is unclear whether or not Sandel knew about the censorship, but the censored text became the accepted one even after the war and after her death, and remained so until the translator Gun-Britt Sundström rediscovered the original text when translating it in 1994. Tarjei Vesaas's *Det store spelet* (1934) was heavily edited and sanitised for the school edition without the author's knowledge. When Gunvor Hofmo's *Samlede dikt* appeared in 1996, the year after her death, the poems had been edited by Jan Erik Vold, who in his own words 'har ... hjulpet til, her og der' (helped a bit here and there, p. 522). The help consisted partly in adding full stops in 75 places where they had not been used originally – a subtle but not insignificant change reminiscent of the 'tidying up' of Emily Dickinson's poems when they were first published.

Students of literature need to be aware of these evolutions in the texts they are reading, and researchers have not always been careful enough to make sure that their references are accurate. The analysis

of *Bare Alberte* in Åse Hjorth Lervik's study of Cora Sandel, *Menneske og miljø i Cora Sandels diktning* (1977), for example, is based on the censored version – and concludes that Alberte's political engagement is not very strong. A lack of attention to when and in what form Hauge's poems were first published and later revised has led more than one researcher to misleading conclusions about the author's intentions and preoccupations.

This is not a work which should necessarily be read in one sitting, as the authors point out – it is more to be consulted as the occasion arises. The chapters are of somewhat varying quality, and often make extensive use of the work of other scholars. The most interesting ones are those which trace the changes in texts over time. There is less to be said about this with regard to authors like Ibsen and Skram, who revised little after first publication. The chapter on Skram is more about her relationship to her publishers, and relies heavily on my biography – though it does provide a somewhat different perspective on her economic situation, of which I shall certainly take note. The one on Ibsen focuses on revisions in performance, and is mostly familiar material; it was unfortunate for the authors that this volume appeared in the same year as the much more comprehensive *Ibsen, Scandinavia and the Making of a World Drama* by Narve Fulsås and Tore Rem. (In passing, Dingstad also takes a rather extraordinary sideswipe at the recent edition of Ibsen's works, *Henrik Ibsens Skrifter* (2005-10), the first complete, accurate and fully annotated collection of Ibsen's writings and letters. This he regards as an expensive waste of money which 'står i bokhylla som en bauta ingen bruker' (stands in the bookcase like a monument no-one uses, p. 167). This is certainly not true in the case of this researcher; it is an exceedingly useful edition which I consult regularly.)

It is impossible, of course, to cover all aspects of the publishing history even of the sixteen authors studied. The volume does not deal very extensively with translations, for example, though they do figure on occasion. The material is a little repetitive at times, especially in the earlier chapters, which could have been shortened; on the other hand more could have been said about the physical form of books, such as the evolution of cover design and what it tells us about changes in

advertising technique and reader preference. In the chapter on Aksel Sandemose, to take just one example, there are five illustrations which are all photographs of the author, and no reproductions of the covers of his books.

Despite minor quibbles, however, this is an impressive collection of studies and a salutary reminder of the importance of checking the publishing history of a text before drawing conclusions about the author's intentions or its contemporary relevance. It will not just be a monument on my shelf, but a work I shall dip into frequently.

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