

AAGE JØRGENSEN (ed.):

Johannes V. Jensen. Ord og virkelighed. Forfatterskabets hidtil ikke optrykte artikler. Vols. 1-5.

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Danish literature's bibliographer par excellence, Aage Jørgensen, has single-handed and with his usual patience and diligence managed to collect and edit – as the subtitle of this publication tells – *all* newspaper and magazine articles by the Danish writer and Nobel Prize-winner

Johannes V. Jensen (1873-1950) which have never been reprinted in book form. In addition, Jørgensen has provided each single text with extensive footnotes, each of the five volumes with an index of names and, finally, volume 5 with an extensive and excellent postscript, which is a valuable supplement to Jensen's biography, based on the published material, as well as a bibliography, a timetable and a subject index. And one is tempted to add: 'etc. etc.' It should furthermore be mentioned that the volumes are provided with a number of illustrations, including lesser known photographs of Jensen. The magnitude of this project becomes obvious when one considers that Jensen was active as a writer of these articles from 1898 to 1950; thus the five volumes contain a total of 550 texts which are accompanied by more than 3300 footnotes. And, of course, the inquisitive Jørgensen has unearthed texts which the standard bibliography by Aage Marcus and Fritz Johansen has missed, as well as some articles published after their bibliography was issued in 1951.

Throughout his life Jensen wrote his articles for various newspapers, primarily *Politiken* – for this newspaper alone 545 articles in all – and magazines, not only in Denmark. A significant number of his articles were also published in Germany during the pre- and interwar period, such as in the *Die Neue Rundschau* in Berlin. Many of his articles, of course, Jensen reissued in slightly edited versions in his many essay collections, but, nevertheless, Jørgensen has had plenty of texts left for his five volumes. These texts are printed in chronological order with misprints and wrongly spelled personal names and place names implicitly corrected.

What were the topics of these articles? Jensen was a widely read and immensely knowledgeable and well-informed person, and in addition an excellent journalist and reporter, which is confirmed when perusing Jørgensen's edition. And, furthermore, Jørgensen has also included a few fictional texts, although these are not unknown to Jensen scholars, for instance the historical dramatic episode 'Oluf Hunger' from 1899. Likewise important is the inclusion of two lyrical texts from 1901, printed in prose form, which later were reissued as the two well-known poems 'Interferens' and 'Ved Frokosten'.

And how did Jensen write? He was able to write pedagogical articles

about archaeological, historical, zoological and anthropological topics – frequently guided by his strong, almost dogmatic Darwinian orientation – employing a rather dry matter-of-fact style. In addition, he frequently participated in current debates on the same topics, as well as on politics, displaying quite a rhetorical talent. With rapture he could share his impressions and experiences from his many travels as well as writing reviews and portraits of Danish and foreign authors, above all Rudyard Kipling – about whom he also wrote a book in 1912 – Heinrich Heine and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, but also of writers from his own time. Thus he seems to have been the first in Scandinavia to draw attention to Bernhard Kellermann and Ernest Hemingway in articles in *Politiken* from July 21, 1911 and May 30, 1930 respectively. Furthermore, from 1902 we find a laudatory review of a performance at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen of Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* with knowledgeable comments on Ibsen's text.

We find an abundance of enthusiastic descriptions of the flora and fauna of Denmark, but also snappish, polemic and quite spiteful portraits of people Jensen did not appreciate. Of these there is quite a number which are particularly aimed at representatives of the conservative Copenhagen bourgeoisie such as the critics Alfred Ipsen – 'Ipsens Navn vil blive glemt. Han arbejdede hele sit Liv paa sin egen Glemsel' (vol.1, p. 57) (Ipsen will be forgotten. All his life he worked at being forgotten), Henning Kehler and the literary historian Hans Brix. But also several writers became the target of Jensen's venom. Best known is probably his assault on the homosexual Herman Bang: 'Staklen (...) lider formodentlig i Øjeblikket af platonisk Kærlighed til en Løjtnant' (vol. 1, p. 222) (For the moment the poor devil is probably suffering from platonic love for a lieutenant). Similarly harsh is Jensen's characterization of the rather insignificant imitative poet Ernst von der Recke, who is described as an 'Allemandsnar' (vol.1, p. 58) (public fool) and 'latterlig Mandsling' (vol. 1, p. 59) (ridiculous manikin) – a true fireworks of invectives. In later years Jensen grew somewhat gentler and more tolerant.

In many of the articles the Nobel Prize-winner's wit and linguistic genius flash, in particular when he depicts animals, nature, wind and weather. Such texts are primarily to be found in the first three volumes

up to the year 1933; in these we find Jensen at his best with regard to both content and style. Later on inspiration could run short and many of these articles show strong traces of being pieces of drudgery, written in order to support him and his family financially.

Thus not all texts live up to Jensen's reputation as one of the greatest Scandinavian stylists, but the reader is nevertheless presented not only with fascinating insights into the way he was able to mould and develop the Danish language but also into the intellectual complexity of a great and many-faceted artist. Thus it is commendable that Jørgensen has included lock, stock and barrel, also the short prose pieces from a newspaper, *Pressen*, which Jensen produced during a short period in the summer of 1906, before he had to close it down. A typical sample would be his introduction to a strip cartoon from July 2 about 'Jakob', in fact the first cartoon in Denmark altogether:

Her er Jakob, en god Dreng. Oprindelig var han Amerikaner, men fra nu af er han altsaa adopteret af Danmark. Hans Navn histovre var Jimmy, og den uendelige Historie om, hvordan han skal gaa Ærinder for sin kedelige Fader og altid indvikler sig i Vidtløftigheder undervejs, takket være sin Sans for Gadens Aktualiteter, har frydet mere end een Million smaa Jimmier hinsides Havet. Nu hedder han Jakob og er vort umistelige Nationaleje. (vol. 1, p. 171)

(Here is Jakob, a good boy. Originally he was American but from now on he is adopted by Denmark. His name over there was Jimmy and the endless story about how he has to run errands for his boring father and always on the way gets involved in escapades owing to his awareness what is happening in the street, has delighted more than one million little Jimmies on the other side of the ocean. Now his name is Jakob and he is our inalienable national treasure.)

Certainly this collection will not find a large audience eagerly devouring its contents. However, Jensen aficionados and scholars all over the world will be extremely grateful to Aage Jørgensen for his five volumes. The result is impressive.

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