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Danish Literature

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[TT]Danish Literature

[A]Michael Kallesøe Schmidt

[H2]1. General

[H4]Current Trends.

Forme di narrazione autobiografica nelle letterature scandinave, ed. Massimo Ciaravolo, Sara Culeddu, Andrea Meregalli, and Camilla Storskog, Florence U.P., 393 pp., gathers the contributions of The Ninth Italian Conference on Scandinavian Studies which took place in 2013. At the time, various forms of autobiographical narration were highly topical. The volume includes two contributions on an important frontrunner of contemporary autofiction, namely Karen Blixen/Isak Dinesen: Bruno Berni, 'Autobiografia e prospettiva in Karen Blixen', pp. 201-08, compares self-representation in autobiography and letters, respectively; and Paola Canu, 'The names in the life and works of Isak Dinesen/Karen Blixen', pp. 209-16, discusses the multiple personal names of B. and her many characters, with special respect to her fictional character Pellegrina Leoni. Elena Putignano, 'Dangling between fiction and autobiography: Aksel Sandemose and the unquiet quest for the self', pp. 217-31, debates the biographical bias in much scholarship on the Dano-Norwegian author and, building on this, approaches the autobiographical element of the authorship. Sandemose is also present in Valeria Borsotti, '*Find Holger Danske: Articulating complexity through bricolage*', pp. 343-54, though this article takes a completely different point of departure. Through an analysis of Maja Lee Langvad's debut, the question of identity in contemporary autobiographical literature is raised. The volume provides with historical perspectives and original angles on the strongest current of contemporary Scandinavian literature.

Lars Handesten, '99% litteratur: Mod en ny litteraturhistorieskrivning', *Spring*, 37:113-42, draws on Franco Moretti's studies of "the great unread", a notion coined by Margaret Cohen designating the vast majority of literature which is forgotten and/or unavailable. In the wake of H.'s recent monograph *Bestsellere: En litteratur- og kulturhistorie om de mest solgte bøger i Danmark siden 1980*, Hellerup, Spring, 573 pp., he claims attention to the bulk of popular literature which is normally not taken into consideration in Danish literary histories. Thus, what is allegedly unread by literary scholars is well-known by readers outside academia. To repair this omission, H. propagates the study of a canon of the market, enabling scholars to cover new ground and widen the scope of scholarly treatments of literature. Such a replacement of qualitative evaluation with quantitative measures cannot stand alone, but the proposal is refreshing and could lead to fruitful explorations of a literature which is popular in the proper sense of the word.

Hans Otto Jørgensen, *Horden: 13 digterportrætter 1872-1912*, Copenhagen, Gladiator, 308 pp., is a collection of portraits of 13 authors (12 Danish and a single Norwegian) pertaining to The Modern Breakthrough. The aim is a revaluation of the canon of the period and its idiosyncrasies. J. deliberately portraits authors who have conventionally resided in the periphery of literary history alongside well-known protagonists such as J. P. Jacobsen, Herman Bang, et.al. An important source of inspiration could be the doctoral dissertation by Pil Dahlerup,

Det moderne gennembruds kvinder, Copenhagen, Gyldendal, 1983, XLIII + 689 pp., in which the dominance of male authors in the scholarly debate of the period is challenged. J. portrays seven female and six male authors in his explicitly subjective account which is not an academic dissertation, but rather a challenge to the conventions of scholarship. The publishing house is run by J., and the 13 portraits should be regarded in connection with Gladiator's publications of Danish literary classics which also aims at extending the knowledge of authors who are conceived as forgotten or marginalized. Thus, many of the portrayed authors have been republished by J. himself.

Anders Juhl Rasmussen and Erik Skyum-Nielsen, 'Mordet på fortælleren: Den internationale modernismes forgreninger i dansk samtidsprosa', *Kritik*, 213:57-68, considers the intratextuality of three novels by Jeppe Brixvold, Pia Juul, and Niels Frank. All three authors are read in the light of international protagonists of high modernism. The overall aim is to establish the claim that the founding fathers of modernism are highly relevant to a certain current in contemporary Danish prose fiction. This is demonstrated convincingly, but the tradition of modernism is hardly likely to become the next centre of attention for literary scholarship, as the article tends to assert.

Jan Rosiek, *Danmark, Gurre, stranden: Steder i dansk litteratur*, Copenhagen, U Press, 171 pp., entails the prominence of place studies in recent literary scholarship. R. debates the relevance of literary studies in general, and the current trend of place studies in particular, arguing that the local notion of place can provide with an alternative to the grand narratives of globalization. This statement defends the seemingly arbitrary selection of places studied in the book: Whereas the nation Denmark conceived as a place is relevant to any discussion of nationality, the two castles named Gurre are apparently only of specific interest to scholars studying depictions of their location. However, R. convincingly demonstrates the potentials of his methodological principles in his concise treatment of literature concerned with the most famous Gurre castle and its surroundings. The third chapter treats poems on beaches by Sophus Claussen and Ole Sarvig. Finally, the book includes a general discussion of core concepts of the spatial turn.

Marianne Stidsen, *Den ny mimesis: Virkelighedstolkningen i dansk og nordisk litteratur efter Anden Verdenskrig*, 2 vols, Copenhagen, U Press, 697, 591 pp., is a doctoral dissertation which views Danish and other Nordic literature since World War II through the lens of Anthony Giddens' concept of late modernity. The plethora of authorships S. analyses are regarded as a wide spectrum of reactions to the conditions of late modernity, especially the construction of an identity which is not firmly rooted in tradition. The public defence of the dissertation on 11 December 2015 caused much debate, and many scholars were provoked by the thematic focus on the individual adopted by S. The mere scope of the study lays S. open for criticism since she touches upon a multitude of authors and works which have and can be read in differing perspectives. Nonetheless, the dissertation is a great scholarly achievement which the entailed debate in itself indicates.

Erik Svendsen, *Kampe om virkeligheden: Tendenser i dansk prosa 1990-2010*, Frederiksberg, Samfundslitteratur, 320 pp., brings the most recent Danish literature into

connection with concurrent cultural debates. The minimalism of the early 1990s is a point of departure for a further discussion of the problem of literary representation in Bent Vinn Nielsen and Jan Sonnergaard. Jens Christian Grøndahl is put into perspective by Ulrich Beck's notion of the "risk society", and a chapter on Kristian Ditlev Jensen and Kim Leine takes up the continuously topical theme of autofiction, drawing on Jon Helt Haarder, *Performativ biografisme: En hovedstrømning i det senmodernes skandinaviske litteratur*, Copenhagen, Gyldendal, 2014, 314 pp. The monograph does not pretend to constitute a complete literary history of the period in question since everything aside from prose fiction is omitted. The argument for this disposition is that this form of literary expression is more representative of reality than for instance poetry. This claim is not entirely convincing, but S.'s contribution to the debate on contemporary Danish literature should be taken into account in future scholarly debate.

[H4]Literary History.

66 håndskrifter fra Arne Magnussons samling, ed. Matthew Driscoll and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, Copenhagen, Museum Tusulanum, 237 pp., celebrates the 350th birthday of Arne Magnusson, founder of the Icelandic manuscript collection at the University of Copenhagen. The volume contains illustrated descriptions of 66 manuscripts from the collection, an introduction to Magnusson, and a contribution on book manufacturing in the Middle Ages. Thus, it gives insight into the collection and its history while providing with some amount of contextual knowledge. It is more of an inspirational publication than a scholarly work in its own right, but it fulfills the task of introducing the subject beautifully.

Lene Halskov Hansen, *Balladesang og kædedans: To aspekter af dansk folkevisekultur*, Copenhagen, Museum Tusulanum, 373 pp. + CD, is a study of narrative song and chain dance in the Danish ballad tradition. Thus, the well-known subject is investigated in a strictly performative perspective. H. admits that the medieval sources on the conduct of singers and dancers of ballads are extremely scarce, but the performative focus allows her to move forward from this period and on to the 19th and 20th centuries. Throughout the monograph, questions of oral transmission, acquisition of the tradition, the meaning the ballads convey, and the artistic expression of ballad performers are discussed. In addition, five chapters analyze recordings of ballad performances from the 20th century which are enclosed on a CD. As a folkloristic counterpart to philological and historical treatises on the subject, the monograph amounts to a valuable scholarly achievement.

Eva Pohl, *Et lyst værelse: Empati, rumopfattelse, kunstnerisk selvspejling og æstetik i kvindelige danske forfatteres og billedkunstneres værker i perioden 1930-90*, Odense, Syddansk U.P., 129 pp., delves into the cross-aesthetic field of female authors and visual artists in the 20th century. By juxtaposing Karen Blixen, Tove Ditlevsen, Inger Christensen, Dorrit Willumsen, and Pia Tafdrup with photographers, sculptors, painters, and more of their time, P. studies a series of motifs from a female perspective. The result is as an inspiring, original, and beautiful instance of interdisciplinary scholarship.

Birgitte Possing, *Ind i biografien*, Copenhagen, Gyldendal, 301 pp., is a genre study of the biography. Whereas an abundance of contemporary Nordic scholarship is preoccupied with autofiction and autobiography, the biography has not been given much attention. P. polemically states that the gender of biographers is necessary to take into account, and she does so by statistical surveys of male and female biographers in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden after the year 2000. Furthermore, P. recounts the history of the biography and construes a typology of the genre, resulting in eight different categories. From a genre theoretical standpoint, this typology could easily be criticized, but the mere scope of it (more than 2000 years of biography) deserves acknowledgement. Next, P. assesses six examples of which five are Scandinavian. Finally, the ethics and general principles of the genre are discussed in an international perspective. The polemical book is an impressive and refreshing contribution to the study of biography which calls for responses by scholars of contemporary autofiction.

H.E. Sørensen, *Alle de skjalde: Litteraturen i Sønderjylland og Sønderjylland i litteraturen*, Aabenraa, Historisk Samfund for Sønderjylland, 664 pp., is the first literary history devoted to cover the region of Southern Jutland. Thus, it is a regional literary history, but it does not follow place theory, though it could possibly be inspired by “the spatial turn”, cf. Rosiek above. An important focal point is the struggle between Danish and German in the region bordering these two countries. Language is inherent in the concept of nationality, but as S. shows, it can also have the function of a common ground between two nationalities. The study is contextualized in history and chronologically divided into chapters each treating an important period or event in the history of the region. Priority is given to the dramatic 19th century and its consequences for the nationality of various parts of the region. An abundance of authors unfamiliar to most literary scholars are presented and discussed. Methodologically, S. is conservative, but his choice of subject is highly original and refreshing.

Torben Weinreich, *Den socialistiske børnebog*, Frederiksberg, Roskilde U.P., 130 pp., studies the phenomenon of politically biased children’s literature in 1970s Denmark. W. demonstrates that the economic conditions of authors of children’s literature were remarkably fruitful in this decade, and that this specific type of literature was intensely debated in academia and other areas of society. The study is a continuation of W.’s own comprehensive *Historien om børnelitteratur: Dansk børnelitteratur gennem 400 år*, Copenhagen, Branner and Korch, 2006, 603 pp., which covers the centuries leading up to the 1970s. Six authors are discussed, including W. himself. Thus, the scholarly debate of extant research within the field is added a more personal dimension.

[H4]Poetry.

Bjørn Arnfred Bojesen, *En undersøgelse af fænomenet rim*, Copenhagen, Museum Tusulanum, 159 pp., asks the fundamental question: What is rhyme? B. begins with the conclusion that not one single definition of rhyme can be applied to all languages. Next, he assesses 12 definitions of the subject as a point of departure for his own definition which is a single sentence consisting of nine lines. This definition places emphasis on the experience of the listener or reader whose ability to distinguish and compare phonological qualities of language is considered key to the emergence

of rhyme. The theoretical analyses are mainly exemplified by Danish literature (including song lyrics) from medievality to the present. The short monograph distinguishes itself by a both scholarly sound and relatively accessible treatment of a subject which is normally reserved for a limited readership of specialists.

Dansk samtidslyrik, ed. Peter Stein Larsen and Louise Mønster, Aalborg U. P., 306 pp., <[http://vbn.aau.dk/da/publications/dansk-samtidslyrik\(b199cfee-741c-45e9-8564-1625024f9206\).html](http://vbn.aau.dk/da/publications/dansk-samtidslyrik(b199cfee-741c-45e9-8564-1625024f9206).html)>, marks the launch of the publication series *Studies in Contemporary Poetry* based in the Center for Research in Contemporary Poetry at Aalborg University which emerged in 2013. Like the research centre, this open access volume is devoted to cross-generic poetry, chasing the lyric in untraditional formats such as ice-lolly sticks, blogs, music, and artist's books. Two of the contributions deal with enfant terrible Yahya Hassan: the one studying his only published collection of poetry, the other focusing on the characteristics of his voice during poetry readings. In the rest of the volume, the works of both young and older poets are discussed, including Lars Skinnebach, Niels Frank, Asta Olivia Nordenhof, Signe Gjessing, Lea Marie Løppenthin, Pablo Llambías, and Per Højholt.

Peter Stein Larsen, *Poesiens ekspansion: Om nordisk samtidsdigtning*, Hellerup, Spring, 353 pp., sums up the work of L. since his much debated doctoral dissertation *Drømme og dialoger: To poetiske traditioner omkring 2000*, Odense, Syddansk U.P., 2009, 560 pp. The publication consists of eight individual articles of which many have been published in previous versions. Yet, they are tied together by the common theme of the expansion of poetry from serious literature printed in books to other modes of expression and publications forms. Furthermore, an introduction and some closing remarks connect the common thread of the volume. In the articles, contemporary poetry is related to literary history, other art forms, societal changes, and literary criticism. The two final articles adopt perspectives of the sociology of literature in order to account for current transformations in literary criticism and views on literature in society at large. Throughout the volume, Danish and subsequently Nordic literature is in focus.

Louise Mønster, 'Lyrik? En refleksion over den lyriske genres aktuelle status', *Passage*, 74:65-78, continues the above work of Peter Stein Larsen. The article gives a status of the lyric genre with the purpose of evaluating the alleged transformation of the genre in contemporary Danish literature. M. insists that the concept of genre is still relevant and repeats the frequently recurring claim that the term is not merely of a taxonomic nature. In the effort to demonstrate the experimental nature of contemporary Danish poetry, M. perhaps overstates the previous hegemony of the monologic tradition of poetry printed on books. However, the article provides with an interesting perspective on a wide range of contemporary poets.

[H2]2. Individual Authors

[H4]Andersen.

H. C. Andersen og det uhyggelige, ed. Jacob Bøggild, Ane Grum-Schwensen, and Torsten Bøgh Thomsen, Odense, Syddansk U.P., 225 pp., calls attention to the uncanny/"das unheimliche" in

Andersen which according to the editors has been widely overlooked by scholarship and often lost in translations from Danish. Though A. is world famous for fairy tales partly aimed at children, the editors consider *das unheimliche* to be a prominent trait of his authorship. Apart from the introduction, the volume comprises ten articles written by Danish scholars on uncanny aspects of the authorship. It is the third publication in the series *Skifter fra H. C. Andersen centret* revitalizing the research in A. with refreshing perspectives on the authorship.

[H4]Baggesen.

Anna Sandberg, *En grænsegænger mellem oplysning og romantik: Jens Baggesens tyske forfatterskab*, Copenhagen, Museum Tusulanum, 350 pp., is a study of one of the borders of Danish literature: the German-language literature of Jens Baggesen. B. is indeed canonized, and even his non-Danish literary works are of crucial interest to Danish literary scholarship. S. posits that her subject was both bilingual and bicultural and regrets the marginalization of his German-language authorship from nationally oriented literary scholarship. As the first monograph entirely devoted to the German-language part of his authorship, the study aims at mending matters. Throughout the investigation, historical context is taken into account and related to Baggesen's works. The study will hopefully inspire future treatments of Danish pre-romanticism.

[H4]Dam.

Ib Johansen, *Plantens sjæl: Studier i Albert Dams forfatterskab*, Århus U.P., 264 pp., takes on the task of revitalizing D's much neglected authorship. Through a series of readings, J. illustrates the diversity of the authorship and its affiliations with concurrent literature, both in Denmark and abroad. A chapter is devoted to the critical reception of D. which J. finds unsatisfactory. He explicitly and convincingly demonstrates that scholarship should pay more attention to his subject.

[H4]Holberg.

Jens Bjerring-Hansen, *Ludvig Holberg på bogmarkedet: Studier i Peder Paars og den litterære kultur i 1700- og 1800-tallet*, Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek-Museum Tusulanum, 333 pp., is a revised PhD dissertation analysing the book market around 1720 when H.'s *Peder Paars* was first published. The published monograph repeats the structure of the dissertation: The first chapter carries on a thorough discussion of book history while the following six chapters each focus on a specific book historical theme, including concurrent print culture, title pages, copyright, readership, and more. Furthermore, quantified "distant reading" is applied in a survey of statistics regarding editions of *Peder Paars*. The relevance of B.-H.'s findings extends this singular work by far. Literary history can indeed be informed by this sound work on print culture in the 19th century.

[H4]Inuk.

Mine drømme har en anden virkelighed: Charlotte Inuk og hendes forfatterskab, ed. Marianne Larsen and Moritz Schramm, Odense, Syddansk U.P., 338 pp., contains 36 contributions divided into sections of personal texts about I. and scholarly readings of her works. A large amount of the readings are theoretically anchored in gender studies, while other contributions focus on colonial

aspects. The overall goal is to call attention to the authorship which is rightfully claimed to be overlooked by scholarship. This is done successfully in an often celebratory, yet serious manner.

[H4]Kierkegaard.

Birgit Bertung, *Søren Kierkegaards pseudonymer og tvetydighed*, Fjerritslev, Forlag1.dk, 106 pp., is yet another title from tireless Kierkegaard scholar B. This time she delves into K.'s much discussed practice of pseudonymity which she conceives as a strategy of indirect communication, forcing readers to critically reflect on the utterances in the works. The pseudonymous literary works are paralleled with K.'s personal life, specifically his ambiguous stance on marriage. One by one, the philosophical principles of the pseudonyms are analyzed, and the author's own accounts of their function are treated. The monograph is a short and concise contribution to the vast scholarship on the subject.

Kierkegaard som eksistentiel fænomenolog, ed. Mogens Pahuus, Jacob Rendtorff og Pia Søltoft, Aalborg U.P., 295 pp., contains 13 contributions on phenomenological aspects of K.'s existentialist philosophy. The volume is included in the book series on existentialist phenomenology published by Aalborg U.P., and the introduction explains that combining K. with phenomenology is a current trend. Through this application of a later branch of philosophy to K., the volume brings his philosophy into dialogue with more recent philosophers such as Paul Ricoeur and Giorgio Agamben.

[H4]Mathiesen.

Tobias Skiveren and Martin Gregersen, *Eske K. Mathiesen*, Copenhagen, Arena, 88 pp., forms part of the series of small monographs on contemporary authors *Arena monografi*. In this short volume, the authors present an author who they themselves consider to be marginal and a poet of the marginal as well. M.'s recurrent themes of nature are analysed and related to the current debate on anthropomorphism. The second main theme is the political aspects of the authorship. M.'s works are published in a large variety of formats, and the diminutive monograph suits its subject well.

[H4]Munk.

Per Stig Møller, *Aldrig skal Danmark dø – Kaj Munks avisdigte 1940 og censuren*, Copenhagen, Kristeligt Dagblad, 135 pp., opposes the broadly accepted notion that M. was sympathizing with the Nazi regime at the beginning of World War II. The book is divided into two parts: an introductory article on M. and censorship, and a reprint of poems which were originally published in newspapers during the German occupation of Denmark. Møller knows his subject very well, and the debate on M.'s stance on Nazism is still of broad interest due to his vast popularity in contemporary society.

[H4]Ott.

Lotte Thrane, *Vildfugl og verdensborger: Tretten fortællinger om Estrid Ott og hendes tid*, Copenhagen, U Press, 323 pp., is a biographical monograph on of Denmark's most successful authors of children's literature. The bulk of the study consists of a chronological account of O.'s

literary works and their biographical and historical context. In a final chapter, T. discusses the reception of the authorship and the great attention it has attracted. In addition, O.'s oeuvre is regarded in the light of the tradition of "bildung". T. gives an entertaining yet serious account of her subject.

[H4]Sandemose.

Steen Andersen, *Nye forbindelser: Pejlinger i Aksel Sandemoses forfatterskab*, Vordingborg, Attika, 343 pp., studies the periphery of S.'s authorship, e.g. genres other than that of the novel. In short stories, travel descriptions, newspaper articles, poems, and more, A. reveals new aspects of the authorship. The monograph is based on thorough archive studies and gives a valuable contribution to further studies.

[H4]Skram.

Kristian Hvidt, *Det moderne gennembrud set igennem Erik og Amalie Skram: Folkestyre, forsvar, litteratur og den nordiske debat om seksuallivet*, Copenhagen, Vandkunsten, 410 pp., is a twin biography and a historical treatise, but first and foremost an in-depth source study. Guided by the fates of two important literary figures of the modern breakthrough, H. finds a new angle on this very well documented period in Scandinavian literature. Key historical events are exposed through biographical accounts of the two protagonists, and more importantly, their correspondence with each other and a multitude of other members of the cultural elite of the time is discussed and comprehensively cited. The monograph could easily inspire future research in the S. archives.

[H4]Willumsen.

Marina Allemanno, *Prinsesse sukkergodt med barberblad: Læsninger i Dorrit Willumsens forfatterskab*, is a comprehensive reading of W.'s authorship. Organized respectively in thematic chapters bridging works from various decades and chapters focusing on single works, the monograph aspires at a complete study of its subject matter. Yet, a phenomenological focus on the body guides the analyses of the material. A. is obviously urged by a fascination with W., but this does not prevent her from providing with a serious scholarly work.

[H2]3. The Danish Golden Age

Mellem ånd og tryksværte: Studier i trykkekulturen og den romantiske litteratur, ed. Robert W. Rix, Copenhagen, Museum Tusulanum, 201 pp., contains book historical perspectives on Scandinavian and British romanticism. The editor's long introduction and Klaus Müller-Wille, "De er rigtignok godt indbunden": Om bokens poetik hos Johan Ludvig Heiberg och Søren Kierkegaard', pp. 61-92, reveals the fruitfulness of the combination of book history and romanticism. It is indeed refreshing to have the ideals of the age countered by material circumstances, and the contributions balance elegantly between concrete fact and individual analysis.

Jon Stewart, *The cultural crisis of the Danish golden age: Heiberg, Martensen and Kierkegaard*, Copenhagen, Museum Tusulanum, 337 pp., takes departure in the historical context of what is often referred to as the Danish golden age: the first half of the 19th century. The key word is crisis, and S. claims that the notion of crisis is predominant in the minds of the cultural

protagonists of the period. In a thorough discussion of the conception of and responses to this crisis in works by J. L. Heiberg, H. L. Martensen, and Søren Kierkegaard, S. shows how the critical context of the golden age was a motivating force, instigating new thoughts and ideas. Though the book is comprised of new versions of previous material, it adheres to the structure of the dissertation due to its sharp and consistent focus.