Twentieth-Century Danish Writers

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Dictionary of Literary Biography

Jeppe Aakjær
(10 September 1866 – 22 April 1930)

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BOOKS: Missionen og dens Hænding (Copenhagen: J. Eralslev, 1897);
Bændens Smør: Skildringer fra Fjends Herred (Copenhagen: V. Oscar Søtofte, 1899);
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Sten Stenisen Blicherets Lise-Tragodie i Breve og Aktykker, 3 volumes in 36 parts (Copenhagen & Christiansa: Gyldendal, 1903–1904);
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Min første Tal: En Skitse, Jule 1922 (Holstebro: Printed by Niels P. Thomsen, 1922);
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I Ophyningsens Tervisinde: Et Unglejeminde Jule 1924 (Holstebro: Printed by Niels P. Thomsen, 1924);
Kongenhus: En Luftspørg, Jule 1925 (Holstebro: Printed by Niels P. Thomsen, 1925);
dal. 1938)—comprises Vadsensfolk; Bondens am; Af Gammel Johannes hans Bivælkiikasting; Arbejdets Glæde;
Jyske folkeminder, edited by Bengt Holbek. Danmarks folkeminder, no. 76 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1966);
De stille folk: Sociale Artikler og Fortællinger, edited by Sølve Bjørre and Hans Jørn Christensen (Copen-
hagen: Gyldendal, 1980);
Digtet af Jeppe Aakjær, edited by Asger Schnack (Copen-
Editions in English: Four Poems, translated by J. A. Pechl (N.p.: W. Wakelee, 1917)—comprises
Songs of the Heath, translated by J. Glyn Davies (Llanfair-
fechan, Wales: H. Glyn Davies, 1963);
"Off for the Day," translated by W. Glyn Jones in Con-
temporary Danish Prose, edited by Elias Bredsdorff (Copen-

OTHER: Fra vor Hjemme: Vers og Prose i Jysk Mandart, edited by Aakjær (Aarhus: Det Jydske Forlag, 1902);
Jysk Stævne: Et Aarskrift, edited by Aakjær (Aarhus, 1902);
Danmark: Illustreret Afdannsk udført af den danske Presse, edited by Aakjær and Gustave Hetch (Copen-
hagen. 1919-1924);

The three short lines that Jeppe Aakjær wrote during his early student years as the motto for the new flag of Catalina, the Social Democratic student association. "Fra Folket vi kommer, til Folket vi gaar, des Lykke skal være vor Lov" (From the folk we come, to the folk we go, its good fortune shall be our law), summarize the ideas that shaped his long authorship. Aakjær was one of a group of authors from Jutland who emerged on the literary scene during the first decades of the twentieth century. They were loosely grouped by critics as the "Jutland movement" or as "folkelige realister" (folk realists) since their realistic mode of writing had a strong connection to the rural folklife of the Jutlandic peasantry. This new hjemstemsitterature (regional literature) became a significant literary movement in Denmark. Though the authors, as Aakjær himself points out in his memoirs, hardly formed a cohesive group. Instead, they were bound together by their love of the rural regions of Jutland. Other than Aakjær, authors

who are considered to be part of this group include Johannes V. Jensen—perhaps the most successful of the authors in the loosely affiliated movement—and his sister, Thit Jensen; Marie Bregenhed, to whom Aakjær was married for seven years; Knud Hjorup; Johan Skjoldborg; Martin Andersen Nexø; best known for his four-volume socialist novel, Pelle Erobreren (Pelle the Conqueror, 1906-1910); Theger Larsen; and Jakob Knudsen.

Later in life, Aakjær was somewhat puzzled by the lack of a leader for the "Jutland movement." In his memoirs, he complains,

Alle de andre Literaturreunneringer havde fra forste Færd haft en Færer. Romanakken havde Johan Ludvig Heiberg og adskillige andre. Realismen fra 70erne havde aldrig Georg Brandes. den unøgelige Læse-
drager, for den ny Tid. Halvfemernes Maaned-
kindemænd havde C. E. Jensen. . . . Men den jydske Retning fik ikke sin egen Kritiker. Den Mand kom ald-
rig frem og har ikke vist sig endnu, der forstod den inderste Nerve i den jyske Retnings Literatur.

(All of the other literary movements had, from the very beginning, a guide. Romanticism had Johan Ludvig Heiberg and assorted others. Realism from the 1870s always had Georg Brandes, the most uncritical point man for the new age. The 1890s moonlight men had C. E. Jensen . . . . The Jutlandic school never had its own

Front cover for Aakjær’s 1924 poem about a wandering Jutlander
Despite this lack of a critical guide, authors from this movement were extraordinarily influential in twentieth-century Danish literature.

Jeppe Aakjær is perhaps best remembered today in Denmark as the author of the lyrics of popular folk songs. After N. F. S. Grundtvig and B. S. Ingemann, Aakjær’s songs constitute the largest group in the 1989 edition of the Fikkehøjskolens Songbog (Folk High School Songbook). Often, poems he had composed were set to music while, at other times, he wrote lyrics intended specifically for songs. These words were set both to familiar folk melodies and new compositions alike. His myriad contributions to Danish popular music include funereal verses in honor of Sophus Schandel, the well-known author, and Viggo Harup, the journalist and radical politician: “The Revolutionary Student,” which was used as the fight song of the University of Copenhagen student association for many years; and other songs such as “Se dig ud en Sommer dag” (Look Outside on a Summer Day, 1905), “Storken” (The Stork, 1912), “Historiens Sang” (History’s Song, 1917), and “Goddav jien” (Good Day Again, 1919). His songs were so popular that the well-known critic Thomas Bredsdorff said to Aakjær in their last conversation, “Hvor maa det være selvsigtet at vide, at man er den danske Sanger, der har skrevet om trent al den Sang, som er helt Sliedled synger?” (It must be a blessing to know that one is the Danish bard who has written just about every song that an entire generation is singing).

Although today Aakjær’s songs completely overshadow the rest of his literary production, he is the author of seven novels, five plays, dozens of short stories, many historical essays printed in collections and the popular press, as well as several collections of poetry and a multivolume literary biography of the great nineteenth-century Danish poet Søren Steensen-Blicher. In fact, it is paradoxical that an author who made no secret of his inability to play a single instrument or read musical notation is now best remembered for songs.

Aakjær was born Jeppe Jensen on 10 September 1866 in the small village of Aakjær in Jutland; in 1906 he changed his name to that of his birth village, a fairly common practice in Denmark. One of eight children, his father, Jens Peder Jensen, was a farm owner who came from a long line of farmers. Aakjær himself experienced early on the difficult toil of rural life that was to become a major focus of his literary endeavors. At a young age he was sent off to tend cattle as a herdboy and, as he grew older, took up the more demanding work of a farmhand. In his memoirs he remembers these early days with a mixture of nostalgia and bitterness. His mother, Cathrine Marie, was a hardworking farmwife whom he remembers singing ballads and other folk songs to her many children. His father, who was a staunch supporter of the Venstre (Liberal) party, inspired both Aakjær’s interest in politics and strong democratic leanings from an early age.

Aakjær’s grandfather also lived at the farm under a quasi-retirement arrangement known as afhest, in which a parent cedes to their child the rights to the farm in return for room and board. These arrangements, which were quite common in late-nineteenth-century Denmark, often became strained. In some cases the elderly parent was used as unpaid labor and received little in the way of lodgings and care. In other cases the parent became a millstone around the grown child’s neck, contributing little to the economy of the farm and demanding a great deal. Aakjær’s own experiences with the cruel aspects of the pensioner’s system came in the form of his grandfather’s tyranny, drinking, and swearing, which cast a pall over his childhood home. These experiences with the afhest system—and his condemnation of it—appeared in many of his writings, particularly the novels Pas Afhest: En Fortælling (In Retirement: A Story, 1907), Venstre Barn: Ei Tynderl. Saga (Children of Wrath: A Servant’s Saga, 1904) and Bomdretn Søm: Skildring fra Fjends Herred (The Peasant’s Son: Pictures from the Fjends District, 1899).

Even though schooling had been made mandatory for Danish children at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in practice many children in rural areas received little education since their help was needed on their parents’ farms. Throughout his youth, Aakjær’s schooling was not particularly rigorous. This circumstance changed, however, when a young teacher named Niels Jakobsen came to the school at Fyly where Aakjær was a student. In 1882 Jakobsen arranged for Aakjær to attend Staby folkehøjskole (Folk High School)—the folkehøjskoler are residential schools for adults with a curriculum influenced by folk culture. In 1884 Jakobsen managed to convince Aakjær’s parents to allow him to travel to Copenhagen to study at Blaagaards Seminarium (Blaagaard’s Teacher’s College). In the intervening two years, Aakjær studied with Jakobsen, with the ultimate goal being a teaching degree. Aakjær, however, left the teacher’s college without finishing his teaching credential, quitting after his preliminary examinations.

Aakjær’s first literary activities were in late adolescence when, in 1883, at the age of seventeen, he began contributing material for Evald Tang Kristensen’s journal, Skattenavnen (The Treasure Hunter), after seeing an advertisement in Højskolebladet (The Folk High School Magazine). Kristensen’s journal was dedicated
to publishing collected folklore—ballads, fairy tales, legends, jokes, riddles, and descriptions of folk-life—from an informal network of collectors throughout Jutland. Young Aakjær was intrigued by the stories he heard on the farms where he worked, and he began in earnest to collect these tales. Over the course of several years, Aakjær contributed more than three hundred folk narratives, riddles, and songs, and the vast majority of these found their way into Kristensen’s journal or other published works. For example, at least seventy-seven legends that Aakjær sent to Kristensen were included in his *Jutske Folkelænkrer VIII: Sag og Overtro fra Jylland* (Jutlandic Folklore VIII: Legends and Superstition from Jutland, 1886). In addition, Aakjær provided Kristensen with a list of potential informants in the Fly area, and Kristensen sought many of these people out on a highly successful fieldwork trip. In return for Aakjær’s extraordinary help and enthusiasm, Kristensen sent Aakjær copies of the issues in which his recordings appeared, as well as some of his other books—primarily folklore collected from people in Jutland.

Even after Aakjær stopped collecting folklore when he moved to Copenhagen in 1884 to prepare for his preliminary examinations for higher education, the two corresponded, albeit with less and less frequency. Kristensen was mildly critical of Aakjær’s collections and felt that Aakjær was unsuccessful in his attempts to duplicate the contours of the Jutlandic dialect, although he praised him for trying. Aakjær later became known as a master of reproducing the Jutlandic dialects in his written works. Indeed, this wish to capture the nuances of folk speech became one of Aakjær’s overwhelming concerns. Later in life, the two men became great admirers of each other’s work, and it was clear that Kristensen felt that Aakjær was one of very few literary men who truly understood the nature of the rural folk. At Kristensen’s eightieth birthday party Aakjær sang his translation of the traditional Scots song in the version popularized by Robert Burns as “Auld Lang Syne,” and this, more than all of the speeches made in Kristensen’s honor, was the most moving moment of the day, according to those in attendance.
Many of the legends Aakjær collected made their way into his later novels and short stories, the clearest example of this transition being *Pv fr gloved Piit: Fra jen si bitte Tid: En Sagsamling* (On Four Glowing Posts: From My Childhood; A Myth Collection, 1923). Set on a foggy summer night in Davbjerg Daas, the work is both a retelling of twenty-six of the many legends that he had collected as a young man and a masterful description of the people who told the stories. In it, Aakjær captures the immediacy of folk performance, coupled to the sounds of the Jutlandic dialect. In Aakjær’s earlier work, *Romende* (as one also finds legend narratives woven into the story. His attention to aspects of folk life also emerge in this novel, providing a rich description of the daily life of his farm-working characters. In his novel *Jens Langkniit: Af Fjendis Herreids Kronnækt bag* (Jens Longknife: From the Chronicle of the Fjend District, 1915) Aakjær further combines his appreciation of folk legend and belief with his historical training, including a fascinating exploration of the role of witchcraft in sixteenth-century Denmark. His preoccupation with themes from Danish legend emerges in his poetry as well, the best example of this being “Bjergrunds-Snaks” (Mound-dweller’s Talk, 1949), written on the occasion of a festival and read by the popular Danish actor Valdemar Mads. The long poem, somewhat reminiscent of Hans Christian Andersen’s *tale Eberhoj* (The Hill of the Elves, 1845), is presented as the words of a mound-dweller, a sometimes threatening supernatural being in Danish folklore, and weaves together many of the popular stories of these creatures.

Aakjær, like many young men and women at the turn of the century, was lured to Copenhagen by the cultural and educational opportunities the city offered. His move to Copenhagen in 1884 marked not only the end of his fledgling career as a folkloreist but also the beginning of his literary career. In Copenhagen he was inspired by the social and intellectual movements of the time. He became intellectually engaged by the ideas of Brandes and Harup and politically awakened by his first political hero, the Jutlandic politician Jens Busk. However, after completing his preliminary examinations in 1886, Aakjær returned from the capital to Jutland, splitting his time between his parents’ farm, Per Odgaard’s farm, and Evers Andersen’s diary, where he often spent time writing during his visits to his home province. He also embarked on a lecture tour of Jutland, speaking primarily at *fokkeloksal*, lecturing about the new ideas that were emerging in the intellectual circles of Copenhagen. His lectures had a strong political slant to them and were often directed at waking the spirit of resistance among the cotters and day laborers. This spirit of resistance, coupled to his passionate critique of religion, was considered by the local authorities to be seditious, and one of these lectures in Viborg landed him in jail for nearly three weeks. In later years Aakjær often emerged as the spokesperson for various social movements, particularly the *humandebønegle* (cotters’ movement) and the *jolveboenjeläver* (servants’ movement).

During the winter of 1887-1888, Aakjær studied at Askov *Folkehøjskole*, one of the many folk high schools that dotted the Danish countryside. His stay at the school, however, seemed to have been of little importance to him. From 1888 to 1890, he worked as a teacher at Elbæk *friskole* (free school) in eastern Jutland but decided not to pursue a career as a schoolteacher. In 1899, in a speech titled “Ungdom og Politik” (Youth and Politics), Aakjær expressed his growing concern with social injustice, a position that emerges again and again in his writings. He ended the speech with words that guided him for the rest of his life: “Jeg vil ikke gjøre Uret, og jeg vil ikke finde mig i Uret.” (I will not commit injustices, and I will not tolerate injustice.) Besides the ideas of Brandes, other strong influences on Aakjær included Charles Darwin, whose works he read in J. P. Jacobsen’s translations, and the social philosophies of Henry George and Karl Marx, especially Marx’s *Das Kapital* (1867, 1885, 1894), which had a significant influence on Aakjær’s developing sense of worldwide injustice. In his memoirs he recounts how Marx’s work inspired him to fight for the democratization of the human spirit and the socialist transformation of society. Many of Aakjær’s works, such as *Vredes Barn o Arbeiders Glaade*: *En Forberedelse om Bønder* (The Joy of Work: A Story about Peasants, 1914), reflect his deep concern with the agrarian proletariat and his strong desire to improve their condition. This social political engagement is perhaps one of the most characteristic aspects of Aakjær’s authorship.

In 1890 Aakjær was drafted; first placed in the infantry in Skive, he was later sent to a barracks in Copenhagen. After six weeks, however, he was discharged because of a problem with his vision. He returned to teaching at Elbæk *friskole* for the remainder of 1890 and part of 1891, then tried his hand working as a teacher at Morren *Ponstrup’s* *fokkeloksal* in 1891 and 1892 but found it difficult to earn enough money to support himself and decided once again that he was not interested in being a teacher. In 1892, with the help of friends, he returned to Copenhagen to continue his studies, intending to earn a degree in history. He married Marie Bregendahl in 1893; she was an author herself and another future member of the Jutlandic school. After seven years and one son, Svend Aakjær, the marriage ended. Even many years later, Aakjær still seemed bitter about the relationship, making only slight reference to it in his final volume of
memoirs. During these student years he became deeply involved in the politics of the student association, and at one point he was elected to its executive committee, a position he held for several years. In 1895 he passed his studentereksamen, and in 1896 he received his candidatus degree. For the next two years, he studied history at the University of Copenhagen, but economic difficulties forced him to abandon his studies and become a professional writer.

In order to support himself during his studies, Aakjær began working for various newspapers in Copenhagen. His first job was as a copyeditor at the Left Reform Party newspaper, Politiken, which was run by one of Denmark’s leading cultural figures, Edvard Brandes, brother of Georg Brandes. While there, Aakjær first drew attention to himself with his early cultural historical work, Missionen og dens Hvidning (The Mission and Its Chieftain, 1897). The title alludes in a derogatory fashion to the Inner Mission, an evangelical Lutheran movement founded by Vilhelm Beck, but the critique in the book extends far beyond a simple attack on this fundamentalist movement. Rather, Aakjær sets his sights on the oppressive nature of Christianity in general. The work is markedly polemical and reveals Aakjær’s deep disgust for what he calls an “anachronistic” conservative Lutheranism. Instead, he emphasizes concepts of fairness and proposes that Christianity, with its emphasis on confession, often deters this human will to justice. Aakjær found the Inner Mission particularly dangerous since most of its supporters lived in the rural areas he loved. In his later works, especially his novels, Aakjær frequently included criticism of the stultifying nature of Christianity, especially that of the Lutheran Church.
Edvard Brandes was impressed with Aakjer's work and promoted him to the position of contributor at Paludan. Aakjer later switched to the newspaper København, a position he kept until 1903. Aakjer later complained about the poor treatment he received from the various newspapers and felt that they had robbed him of time that could have been better spent writing. Brandes, however, continued to be supportive of Aakjer and wrote several positive reviews of his work—a positive review from Brandes was a significant boost for the career of a young author in Denmark.

Aakjer continued his attack on the Inner Mission in his first major literary work, his 1899 novel, Bondens Sm. The novel, which is strongly autobiographical, recounts the story of Jens, a young man who grows up in poverty in rural Jutland. He leaves home and heads to Copenhagen but still feels the oppressive hand of the conservative Christianity that was beamed into him by his grandfather. After some time in the city, the protagonist returns home on a visit, accompanied by a girlfriend from Copenhagen. Rather than giving him a warm welcome, the townpeople reveal their deep provincialism and react negatively to the personal freedoms of the city as personified by Jens. He is not, however, beaten by the conservatim of his hometown. Although he eventually takes over his father's farm and marries his hometown sweetheart, he remains apart from the traditional peasant culture. The book is informed by Aakjer's strong distrust of Christianity and his experiences as a student in Copenhagen. While some critics have dismissed the work as naïve, it reveals Aakjer's first concerted attempt to address issues of both political and cultural importance and an effort to portray rural Jutlandic life in a critical and nuanced fashion.

Aakjer had originally hoped that the important publishing firm of Gyldendal would accept the work, but his initial queries were quickly rebuffed, even though Peter Nansen, an editor at Gyldendal, had earlier encouraged him to submit his work. Aakjer instead found a bookstore owner, V. Oscar Søtofte, who was willing to take a chance on him and publish this first novel. Søtofte soon thereafter published a collection of Aakjer's verse, Derule fra Kjærne (Out There from the Watering Holes, 1899). The relationship was never quite what Aakjer had expected or hoped for, and he felt that Søtofte was unwilling to market his work properly, complaining about the "tasteless" cover Søtofte had chosen for Bondens Sm. A disagreement arose between the two over the publication of Aakjer's collection of short stories describing rural Jutlandic life.

While Aakjer wanted the stories published as a single book, Søtofte felt that the ensuing volume would be far too large and persuaded Aakjer to break the work up into two shorter volumes, only the first of which, Vadmejsolk: Haldfortællinger (Homestead Folk: Heath Stories, 1900), was published by Søtofte. Vadmejsolk was published shortly before Christmas in 1900, but Aakjer did not benefit from the increased sales of the holiday season, since few shoppers were aware of the book. Aakjer was sorely disappointed by the marketing and sales of his works, and his relationship with Søtofte fell apart.

Aakjer, however, had attracted attention to his literary abilities with these first few volumes and the long-sought-after publishing relationship with Gyldendal finally materialized. Fjandboe: Portællinger fra Helden (Fjand Dwellers: Stories from Helden, 1901), which comprised the remaining stories, was the first work Aakjer published with Gyldendal. His main contact and editor at Gyldendal was Nansen, the man who had refused Bondens Sm. Although Aakjer felt that Gyldendal, over the years, occasionally let him down or was overly demanding, their association provided him with a steady income, and Aakjer published virtually all of his books with the firm, the one notable exception being Fjand fra Limfjorden, Romans (The Girl from Limfjord: Novel, 1921), which he published with Danske Forfatteres Forlag, a smaller house. At the beginning of his publishing relationship with Gyldendal, Aakjer arranged with Nansen that he would receive a 150-kroner advance at the beginning of each month, a sum that brought him just above the subsistence level. With this financial arrangement, Aakjer was finally able to abandon most of his journalistic commitments and concentrate on his literary writing. However, the arrangement also meant that Aakjer had to produce a significant amount of material for the press, and he soon found himself in debt to Gyldendal. By 1910 he owed the press 8,000 kroner—even though he received nearly 10,000 kroner for the popular edition of his collected works, an edition that sold close to seventy thousand copies. He immediately had to return most of the money to the press. Aakjer, however, had managed to retain the rights to all of his works, which was not common practice at that time.

At the turn of the century, Aakjer launched himself into a work that was to take control of his life for several years, namely his monumental literary biography, Steen Steensen Blicher's Liiv-Tragödi i Breve og Aktskøker (Steen Steensen Blicher's Life Tragedy in Letters and Documents. 1903–1904). Aakjer spent hours in archives studying throughout the country, following leads, writing letters, collating information, and looking into the smallest nooks and crannies in Blicher's past. For example, in his memoirs Aakjer recounts the excite-
ment of digging through the archives at a women's prison and discovering that Blicher's character Lange Margrethe was based on a real person. The result of Aakjær's obsessive historical research is an extraordinarily thorough accounting of Blicher's life and literary endeavors. The biography was sold by subscription, a common practice at the time, and eventually totaled thirty-six small volumes. Despite Aakjær's enthusiasm and Gyldendal's support for the project, subscriptions were disappointing, with only six hundred copies subscribed, instead of the expected two to three thousand. Critical reception, however, was quite positive, and eventually the work came to be considered a significant contribution to Danish literary history.

In 1905 and 1906 Aakjær published several collections of poetry, namely Fre Felte: En Digtning (Open Field: A Poem Collection, 1905) and Røgner Sange og Andre Digte (Songs of the Rye and Other Poems, 1906). The latter is considered by many to be among his finest works and includes Aakjær's best-known poem, "Jens Langkniv" (Jens Longknife). He wrote the majority of the poems in this collection while staying at the house of his good friends Johanne and Sigurd Ramhous. Unlike his socially and politically aware short stories and novels, Aakjær's poems tend to dwell on the beauty of rural life. His poems are imbued with a lyricism that captures the spirit of peasant life at the same time that it revels in the natural beauty of rural Denmark. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the first thirteen poems of the verse cycle Røgner Sange. Aakjær mentions that he always drew inspiration for his poems on long walks under the open sky, occasionally stopping to jot down the verses or stamping out the rhythm with his feet. Later, he would rework the lines, but the original inspiration always came while he was out in the very landscape that he wrote about. Aakjær, in his rural poetry, owes a great debt to the works of the Scottish poet Robert Burns, a poet whom Aakjær felt had managed to capture the nuances of rural dialects, the beauty of the natural landscape, the emotional life of the farmers, and the contours of day-to-day existence in his verse. Indeed, Aakjær was so taken by Burns's poetry that in 1898 he translated a great deal of his verse into Danish. Later, Aakjær visited Scotland to wander in the same places that Burns had. Aakjær attempted to capture some of the humor of Burns's Tam O'Shanter (1789) in his own humorous piece, Esper Tækk: En Sallingbe-Emp (Esper Tækk: A Sailing Imp, 1913).

In 1906 Aakjær was awarded a fellowship, the Andersen Legat, and set off on a long journey through Europe with his friend Lauritz Larsen. After a jaunt through continental Europe, he returned with Larsen to Denmark and then set out on his own for Scotland. The three months he spent there were truly inspira-
same year he married the artist, Nanna Krog, whom he had met several years earlier in Copenhagen. Their marriage was short and unhappy. Together, they had two children, a son, Eben, and a daughter, Solveig. In 1908 Aakjær was voted a state-supported stipend of 800 kroner a year, and this stipend, combined with the income from Gyldendal, assured him of economic security for the rest of his life. In 1910 Aakjær made Jerele the site for annual folk festivals, known as the Jentefest, attended by several thousand people each year. Among the attendees at these festivals were local farmers, prominent politicians, and novel figures in Danish intellectual, artistic, and literary life. Despite his growing literary prominence, Aakjær remained true to his political and social ideals, and this was reflected in the political spirit of these festivals. In 1916, as a fiftieth-birthday present, Aakjær received six acres of heather-covered hills that abutted the original property. Due to Aakjær’s failing health, the last of these festivals took place in 1929.

In 1907 Aakjær wrote the first of his dramatic pieces, Livet på Hegnegaard, Bondematred i fire Aker (Life at Hegns Farm: Rural Comedy in Four Acts), in which he attempted to capture the spirit of rural life not on the pages of a book, but rather in the living representation of the theater. Aakjær had actually written the majority of this first play many years earlier, in 1901, but when it was rejected by the Folkteater (People’s Theater) in Copenhagen, he put it aside. Not until 1907 did he consider writing for the stage again. With encouragement from a friend, he finished the fourth act of Livet på Hegnegaard, and by 1908 the piece was a commercial success. Although Aakjær was a bit disappointed in the inability of most actors to capture the nuances of the Jutlandic dialect, he continued to write for the stage, following with the play Ulvens Son: Skuespil i fire Aker (The Wolf’s Son: Play in Four Acts, 1909), which engaged many of the social themes he had addressed in his earlier novel, Fredens Barn. The following year, Aakjær wrote Naar Bender elsker: Skuespil i fem Aker (When Peasants Love: Play in Five Acts, 1911) a play that he considered to be his best even though critical and popular receptions were not nearly as enthusiastic as they had been for his first play. Aakjær wrote two more plays during his career, Himmelbjergen: Et Skuespil (The Minister of Himmelbjerg: A Play, 1917) and Rejsesådet: Skuespil i 5 Aker (The Going-Away Party: Play in 5 Acts, 1925), but neither of these were ever performed.

In 1911 Aakjær also published one of his more controversial pieces, Af Gammael Johannes hans Bibeiskiga: Enette Bog om støm Folk (From Old Jøhanne’s Bible Stories: A Little Book about Big Folk, 1911). Aakjær bases the narrator on one of the many excellent storytellers he knew from his home province. In the book the narrator tells several biblical stories, but he relates them in Jutlandic dialect and changes the stories to fit his social and cultural environment. While some critics accused Aakjær of blasphemy, he felt that his stories captured the folk reception of the widely known Bible stories. Making them more accessible to ordinary people. Aakjær continued with his social criticism and critique of institutional religions in several later novels and short-story collections, most notable among these being Hvad det er givende Kræfter: Landarbejderroman. (Where There Are Fermenting Powers: Farmworker Novel, 1916) and Af min Hjemstavn Saga: Lids Bondehistorie (From My Provincial Saga: Little Farmer Story, 1919). He also published several more poetry collections, including Vej og Vind og Folkefærd: Dige (Rain and Wind and Folkfear: Poems, 1916), Hjemtjenere og Ejendom: Digtning (Quaking Grass and Speedwell: Poem Collection, 1921) and Under Aftenstjernen: Dige (Under the Evening Star: Poems, 1927), all of which continued in the vein of his earlier verse.

Toward the end of his life, Aakjær turned his attention to writing his memoirs and rekindled his interest in local history. His memoirs, which detail both life in rural Denmark and the struggles of an author, eventually filled four volumes: Fra min Børne-Tid: En Kulturskiftende Selvbiograf (From My Childhood: A Cultural Historical Autobiography, 1928), Dronningar og KNavnar: Kjærerne Springer og Børken gaar (Boyhood Years and Ladish Years: The Wells Spring and the Stream Flows, 1929), Før det dag: Minder fra Halsosmørnen (Before Dawn: Memories from the Nineties, 1929), and Efterladte Erindringer: Fra Tiden Omkring Aarhundred-Hjørnet og Frensefer (Posthumous Memories: From Times around the Turn of the Century and Afterwards, 1934). Most of these were written from his sickbed. Although he recovered in 1928 from a dangerous bout with gangrene, he died two years later of a heart attack while working in the garden of his farm. His cultural and historical explorations of his home province eventually comprised the six-volume Studier fra Hjemstaven (Studies from the Province, 1929–1932).

Aakjær’s contributions to Danish literature, literary and cultural history, folklore, and popular culture were substantial. His political commitment to the disenfranchised members of the rural economy was a constant feature throughout his long career. Perhaps the lack of critical attention to his work in subsequent years can be attributed to his engagement in his prose with problems of the day. His poetry, which focused more on the beauty of rural life, has accordingly had greater staying power. Even today, his poems, which were often set to music, play an important part in the cultural life of most Danes.
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Many of Jeppe Aakjær's papers are in Det Kongelige Bibliotek (The Royal Library), Copenhagen. His folk­lore collections, which he had sent to Evald Tang Kristensen, are filed under his original name, Jeppe Jensen, in the Dan­sk folke­mindsamling (Danish Folklore Archive); in Det Kongelige Bibliotek.