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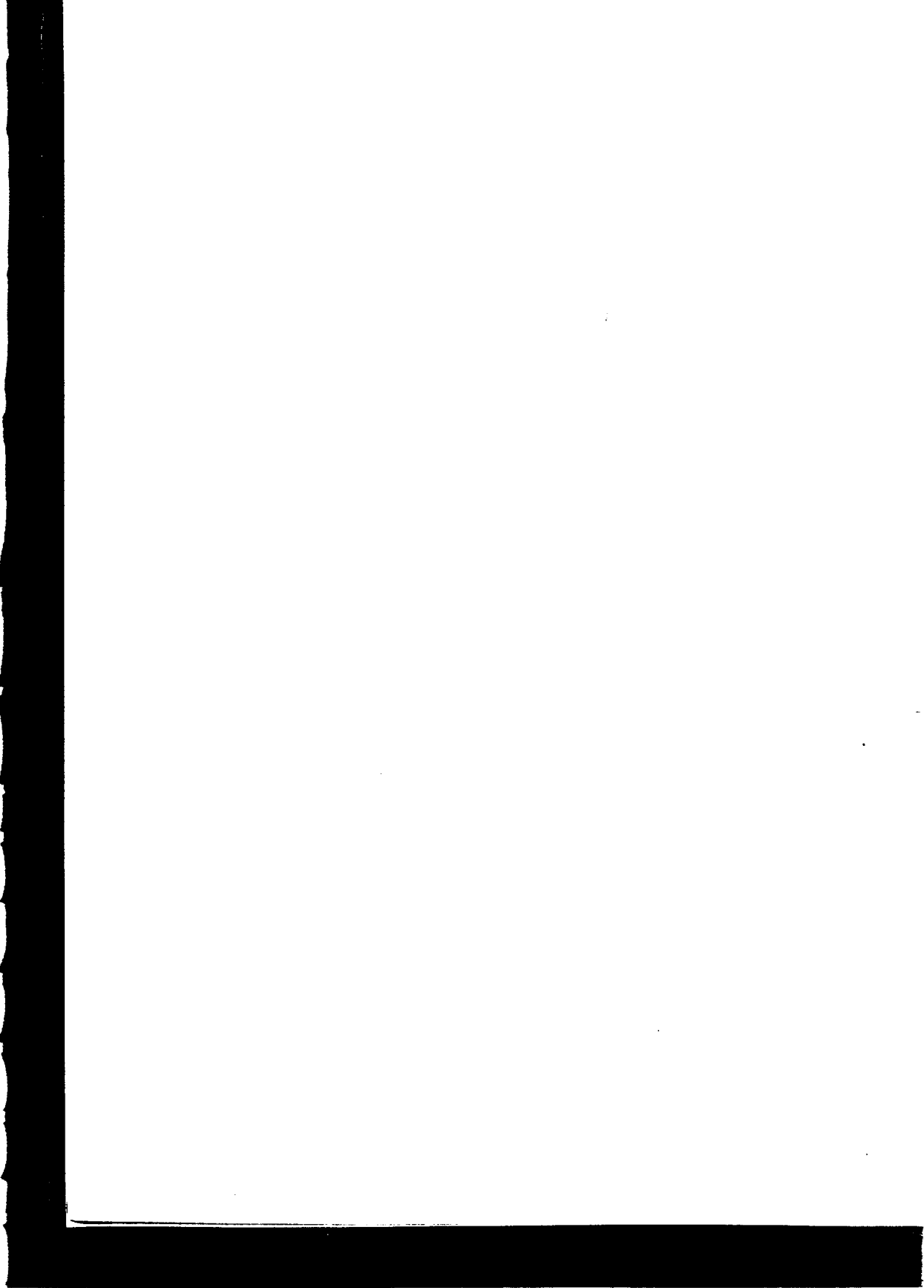
Dictionary of Literary Biography® • Volume Two Hundred Fourteen

Twentieth-Century Danish Writers

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Dictionary of Literary Biography

Jeppe Aakjær

(10 September 1866 – 22 April 1930)

Timothy R. Tangherlini
University of California, Los Angeles

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Jeppe Aakjær (courtesy of Gyldendal Publishers)

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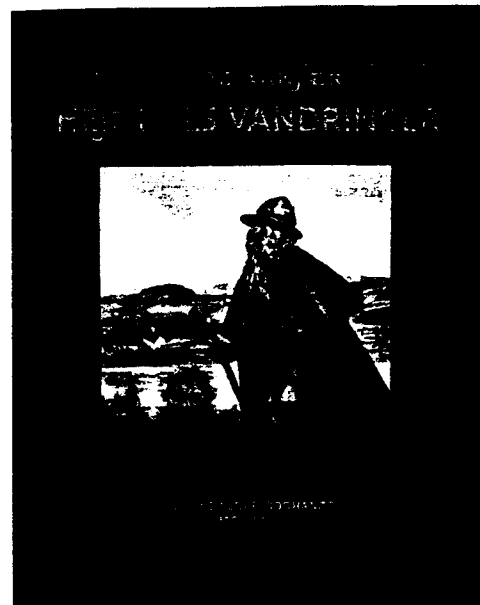
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The three short lines that Jeppe Aakjær wrote during his early student years as the motto for the new flag of Catilina, the Social Democratic student association. "Fra Folket vi kommer, til Folket vi gaar, dets Lykke skal være vor Lov" (From the folk 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 *hjemstavnslitteratur* (regional literature) became a significant literary movement in Denmark even 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



Front cover for Aakjær's 1924 poem about a wandering Jutlander

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 Bregendahl, to whom Aakjær was married for seven years; Knud Hjørtø; Johan Skjoldborg; Martin Andersen Nexø, best known for his four-volume socialist novel, *Pelle Erobreren* (Pelle the Conqueror, 1906–1910); Thøger 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 Litteraturretninger havde fra første Færd haft en Fører. Romantikken havde Johan Ludvig Heiberg og adskillige andre. Realismen fra '70erne havde altid Georg Brandes. den utrætteligste Lansedrager, for den ny Tid. Halvfemsernes Maaneskindsmænd havde C. E. Jensen . . . Men den jydsk Retning fik ikke sin egen Kritiker. Den Mand kom aldrig frem og har ikke vist sig endnu. der forstod den inderste Nerve i den jydsk Retnings Litteratur.

(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 tireless point man for the new age. The 1890s moonlight men had C. E. Jensen . . . The Jutlandic school never had its own

critic. That man never came forward, and still hasn't to this day, who understood the innermost nerve in the Jutlandic school's literature.)

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 *Folkehøjskolens Sangbog* (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 funerary verses in honor of Sophus Schandorf, the well-known author, and Viggo Hørup, 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 "Goddaw igen" (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 velsignet at vide, at man er den danske Sanger, der har skrevet omtrent al den Sang, som et helt Slægtled 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 Steen 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 herdsboy 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 *afstegt*, 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 *afstegt* system—and his condemnation of it—appeared in many of his writings, particularly the novels *Paa Afstegt: En Fortælling* (In Retirement: A Story, 1907), *Vredens Børn: Et Tyendes Saga* (Children of Wrath: A Servant's Saga, 1904) and *Bondens Søn: Skildringer fra Fjends Herred* (The Peasant's Son: Pictures from the Fjend 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 Fly 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, *Skattegraveren* (The Treasure Hunter), after seeing an advertisement in *Højskolebladet* (The *folke* High School Magazine). Kristensen's journal was dedicated



Aakjær in his study at Jenle

to publishing collected folklore—ballads, fairy tales, legends, jokes, riddles, and descriptions of folklife—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 *Jydske Folkeminder VIII: Sagn 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 others' 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 *Po fir glowend Pæl: Fra jens bitte Tid: En Sagnsamling* (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 *Bondens Søn* one also finds legend narratives woven into the story. His attention to aspects of folklife also emerge in this novel, providing a rich description of the daily life of his farm-working characters. In his novel *Jens Langkniv: Af Fjends Herreds Krønike bog* (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 "Bjergmands-Snak" (Mound-dweller's Talk, 1949), written on the occasion of a festival and read by the popular Danish actor Valdemar Mæs. The long poem, somewhat reminiscent of Hans Christian Andersen's tale *Elevhøj* (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 folklorist 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 Hørup 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 Esper Andersen's dairy, 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 *folkehøjskoler*, 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 *husmandsbevægelse* (cotters' movement) and the *lyendebevægelse* (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 gøre 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 *Vredens Børn* and *Arbejdets Glæde: En Fortælling 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 Morten Pontoppidan's *folkehøjskoler* 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



End le Jenle eller som Franskmandene siger Entin seuls
Jeppé Aakjær vender hjem fra Festerne

Caricature of Aakjær by Alfred Schmidt for the magazine Blæksprutten; he is returning to Jenle from Copenhagen, where he was honored for his writing in a celebration on 10 September 1926; the original caption reads "Finally Jenle, or as the French say, 'Alone at Last.' Jeppé Aakjær returns from the parties."

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 Hoveding* (The Mis-

sion 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 distaste 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 Aakjær's work and promoted him to the position of contributor at *Politiken*. Aakjær later switched to the newspaper *København*, but his journalistic career did not develop significantly until 1899, when he became a parliamentary correspondent for the social democratic newspaper, *Provinspressen*, a position he kept until 1903. Aakjær 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 Aakjær 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.

Aakjær continued his attack on the Inner Mission in his first major literary work, his 1899 novel, *Bondens Søn*. 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 beaten 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 townspeople 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 conservatism 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 Aakjær's strong distrust of Christianity and his experiences as a student in Copenhagen. While some critics have dismissed the work as naive, it reveals Aakjær'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.

Aakjær 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. Aakjær 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 Aakjær's verse, *Derude fra Kjørene* (Out There from the Watering Holes, 1899). The relationship was never quite what Aakjær 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 Søn*. A disagreement arose between the two over the publication of Aakjær's collection of short stories describing rural Jutlandic life.

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

Aakjær, however, had attracted attention to his literary abilities with these first few volumes and the long-sought-after publishing relationship with Gyldendal finally materialized. *Fjandboer: Fortællinger fra Heden* (Fjand Dwellers: Stories from Heden, 1901), which comprised the remaining stories, was the first work Aakjær published with Gyldendal. His main contact and editor at Gyldendal was Nansen, the man who had refused *Bondens Søn*. Although Aakjær felt that Gyldendal, over the years, occasionally let him down or was overly demanding, their association provided him with a steady income, and Aakjær published virtually all of his books with the firm, the one notable exception being *Pigen fra Limfjorden: Roman* (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, Aakjær 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, Aakjær was finally able to abandon most of his journalistic commitments and concentrate on his literary writing. However, the arrangement also meant that Aakjær 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. Aakjær, however, had managed to retain the rights to all of his works, which was not common practice at that time.

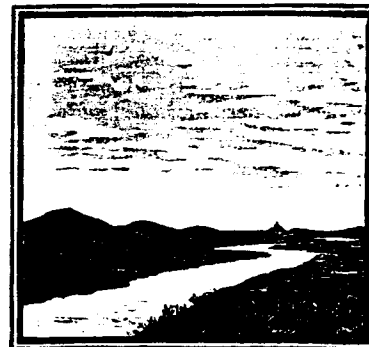
At the turn of the century, Aakjær launched himself into a work that was to take control of his life for several years, namely his monumental literary biography, *Steen Steensen Blichers Livs-Tragedie i Breve og Aktstykker* (Steen Steensen Blicher's Life Tragedy in Letters and Documents, 1903–1904). Aakjær spent hours in archives study 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 Aakjær 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 *Fri Felt: En Digtsamling* (Open Field: A Poem Collection, 1905) and *Rugens 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 Rambusch. 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 *Rugens 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 stomping 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 Tækki: En Sallingbo-Empe* (Esper Tækki: A Salling Imp, 1913).

In 1906 Aakjær was awarded a fellowship, the *Anckerske 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-

JEPPE AAKJÆR
EFTERLADTE
ERINDRINGER



GYLDENDALSKE
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Cover for the final, posthumously published volume of Aakjær's memoirs, edited by Georg Saxild

tional, and through this trip he solidified his artistic connection to Burns. During his stay in Scotland, however, he suffered a relapse of an intestinal problem that plagued him for most of his life and prevented him from seeing as much of Scotland as he had wished. While Aakjær never wrote any works directly related to his travels, he mentions in his memoirs the extraordinary influence his trips abroad had on his poetic perspective. After his fellowship year was over, Aakjær only managed to travel abroad one more time before his death. In 1913 he traveled to Germany, Holland, Belgium, and England accompanied by his son. While on the first trip he had been bored by museums, on this trip he spent nearly two weeks wandering through the collections of the British Museum. A painful blister on his foot, however, curtailed the trip, and they returned to Denmark without revisiting his by then beloved Scotland.

In 1905, the year before he set out on his European travels, Aakjær had purchased fifty-five acres near Salling which, in 1907, became his farm, Jenle. In the

same year he married the artist, Nanna Krog, whom he had met several years earlier in Copenhagen. Their marriage was long and happy. Together, they had two children, a son, Esben, and a daughter, Solvejg. 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 Jenle the site for annual folk festivals, known as the Jenlefest, attended by several thousand people each year. Among the attendees at these festivals were local farmers, prominent politicians, and noted 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, *Livets paa Hegnsgaard: Bondekomedie i fire Akter* (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 Folketeater (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 *Livets paa Hegnsgaard*, 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 Søn: Skuespil i fire Akter* (The Wolf's Son: Play in Four Acts, 1909), which engaged many of the social themes he had addressed in his earlier novel, *Vredens Børn*. The following year, Aakjær wrote *Naar Bønder elsker: Skuespil i fem Akter* (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, *Himmelbjergbrøsten: Et Skuespil* (The Minister of Himmelbjerg: A Play, 1917) and *Rejsegildet: Skuespil i 5 Akter* (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 Gammel Jehannes hans Bivelskistaarri: En lille Bog om stur' Folk* (From Old Jehanne'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 *Hvor der er gjærende Kræfter: Landarbejderroman* (Where There Are Fermenting Powers: Farmworker Novel, 1916) and *Af min Hjemstams Saga: Lidt Bondehistorie* (From My Provincial Saga: Little Farmer Story, 1919). He also published several more poetry collections, including *Vejr og Vind og Folkesind: Digte* (Rain and Wind and Folkspirit: Poems, 1916), *Hjærtægæs og Ærenpris: Digtsamling* (Quaking Grass and Speedwell: Poem Collection, 1921) and *Under Aftenstjernen: Digte* (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 Bille-Tid: En Kulturhistorisk Selvbiografi* (From My Childhood: A Cultural Historical Autobiography, 1928), *Drengaar og Knæseaar: Kilderne Springer og Bækken gaar* (Boyhood Years and Laddish Years: The Wells Spring and the Stream Flows, 1929), *Før det dages: Minder fra Halvfemserne* (Before Dawn: Memories from the Nineties, 1929), and *Efterladede Erindringer: Fra Tiden Omkring Aarhundred-Skiftet og Fremefter* (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 provinces eventually comprised the six-volume *Studier fra Hjemstavn* (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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Papers:

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 folkemindesamling (Danish Folklore Archive) in Det Kongelige Bibliotek.