

En grænsegænger mellem oplysning og romantik

Jens Baggesens tyske forfatterskab

[Crossing the frontier between Enlightenment and romanticism.
Jens Baggesen's German authorship]

By **Anna Sandberg**

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Jens Baggesen (1764–1826) is one of the most important bilingual authors in Danish literary history, but Danish critics have often neglected his German writings, deeming them of inferior quality. While Baggesen had great admirers among poets and writers (for example Heiberg, Kierkegaard, and Andersen), they, too, never acknowledged any real interest in his German texts. In the history of Danish literary criticism, Leif Ludwig Albertsen is the first important critic who, in the 1960s, began a serious study and positive revaluation of Baggesen's German verse.

The rehabilitation of Baggesen's German authorship in Danish literary criticism has now resulted in a first monograph: Anna Sandberg's impressive study, which unfolds in three parts. In part one, Sandberg studies Baggesen's epic *Parthenais, oder die Alpenreise* (1803) and the epic fragment *Oceania* (written 1803–1805, published 1808). In the second part, she discusses Baggesen's two satires *Der*

vollendete Faust oder Romanien in Jauer (finished in 1808, published posthumously in 1836) and *Der Karfunkel oder Klingklingelalmanach* (1809). And in part three she interprets Baggesen's last work, the comical epic *Adam und Ewa* (1826).

With the exception of Baggesen's posthumously published epic on our first parents, his major German writings date from the first decade of the nineteenth century. Sandberg traces a development in these writings 'from optimism justified in Baggesen's faith in enlightenment to pessimism grounded in the post-revolutionary political development' (p. 10; all translations from Sandberg's book into English are by the reviewer). This argument seems persuasive to me, and Sandberg is very adept at relating the texts she interprets to relevant intertextual perspectives as well as to various contemporaneous European contexts, be it the importance of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, Swiss alpine culture, the com-

plexities of German literature around 1806, or James Cook's naval explorations.

Sandberg's historicist approach and her lucid style make for rewarding reading. Baggesen continues in the first decade of the nineteenth century to draw on Kantian and French Enlightenment thinking, classical antiquity, modern science, and canonical literature, but, according to Sandberg, his disillusionment and anger with nationalism in both Danish and German culture increasingly turn him towards satire. As Sandberg points out, Baggesen wanted to secure his canonical place in German literary history by writing epics and at the same time to point his finger at the hollowness he found in romantic literary circles in Northern Europe.

Sandberg regards the traditional idea of Baggesen as an 'antiromantic' as simplistic, and understands Baggesen's poetical '19th century' (p. 35) as consisting of various classicist as well as romantic strains. Sandberg shows convincingly that Baggesen in his satires draws on romantic literary techniques. However this does not necessarily make those satires romantic, as Sandberg argues. Baggesen's German texts, especially the satires (one really misses critical editions of them), are very difficult, and Sandberg's readings are perfect introductions to anyone interested. I also like Sandberg's pervasive emphasis on Baggesen as a real presence in German as well as Danish literature in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Starting with the Danish romantic Adam Oehlenschläger's polemics and satire against Baggesen, the poet

has often been portrayed as a writer, whose important texts all belong to the eighteenth century. This is not true at all, as Sandberg's study ably illustrates.

Baggesen has often been construed by literary historians as an outsider, and Sandberg also refers to him in this way, although he himself chose the destinations of his travels and residences, and was part of an elitist cultural and political network in Europe. It is true that Baggesen was an antagonistic writer, which made him enemies, especially in the romantic circles. I would say his identity as an outsider is ambivalent. Baggesen did not want to belong to any group; rather, like Kierkegaard, he wanted to go it alone and also succeeded partly with many of his literary projects. On the other hand, it is true that his gamble on producing literature for both a Danish and a German audience in the first decade of the nineteenth century, whilst different forms of national romanticisms were on the rise, did make him feel less in sync with his times, particularly when he realised that the majority of readers preferred national romanticism.

One of the great joys of reading Baggesen, in Danish as well as in German, derives from his versatile tonality, as it oscillates between the lyrical, the epic, and the satirical. Baggesen did also write quite a lot of German poetry, producing the two volumes *Gedichte* (1803) and *Heideblumen* (1808), which are not studied in depth by Sandberg. This is the one major aspect I miss in this quite beautiful book, illustrated as it is with Johan Lundbye's exquisite water coloured

drawing from 1845 of the Swiss mountain Jungfrau on its cover: the same mountain climbed by Baggesen's alter ego Nordfrank in *Parthenais*.

Baggesen was an intelligent spectator to the complex European power play in the aftermath of the French Revolution, as well as an insider when it comes to the flowering of German philosophy and literature in his own lifetime. No Danish writer of this period had a broader outlook than Baggesen, which he was well aware of himself. The great strength of Sand-

berg's study is that the reader comes away with a coherent and profound picture of Baggesen as a genuinely European writer. This is his most important legacy today, for both critics and writers, and Sandberg correctly insists that we need to study Baggesen's German authorship in order fully to understand the scope of his literary achievement.

Mads Sohl Jessen
University of Copenhagen