

Mellem ånd og tryksværte

Studier i trykkekulturen og den romantiske litteratur

[Between spirit and ink.

Studies in print culture and romantic literature]

Ed. by Robert W. Rix

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Mellem ånd og tryksværte [Between spirit and print] is a collection of six essays, each examining its subject from the dual perspectives of book history and literary criticism. Despite a growing interest during the past three decades in material studies, print culture, and textual scholarship, the area remains underdeveloped and much published scholarship and teaching still fails to take sufficient account of the fundamental, material conditions from which literature arises. The literary work always manifests itself to its reader in a material form – often a book – and this materialisation always affects reading and interpretation.

With this collection, six important case studies are added to this area of research. And we need excellent case studies like these, which demonstrate the value of the material perspective. The editor's excellent introduction lets us know that this is particularly important in studies of romantic cultural texts. The myth of the inspired

artist working alone at his masterpiece so deeply informs the research clouding the mundane business of literary production that all authors must deal with. But the problem goes beyond romanticism. We are dealing here with a core issue in the human sciences. Any empirical analysis of literature must take into account the mediating documents. This is what Rix's collection demonstrates, covering areas such as reception history, the book as an expressive form, publishing history, translation practises, cultural studies, and textual instability.

Jens Bjerring-Hansen's contribution offers an important reminder of the value of shifting the focus in literary history from who wrote what and when (authors, schools, influences) to what was actually bought and read. The essay covers the reception and publication history of Ludvig Holberg's mock-heroic epos *Peder Paars* (1719–1720). Through a detailed analysis of editions (though not the two

latest from 2015), Bjerring-Hansen performs what could be called a bibliometric literary history and unveils that the success of *Peder Paars* contributed to making Holberg the most published Danish author of the nineteenth century.

Bjerring-Hansen investigates three bibliographic factors that contribute to making *Peder Paars* a bestseller. First, Holberg's works were cheap to reprint, since copyright laws had not yet been implemented effectively. Second, consumers preferred a good bargain, making it easier to sell voluminous books at low cost. And finally, technological advances during the second revolution in book printing – the industrial revolution – meant that *Peder Paars* could be more easily and inexpensively illustrated, thus catering to a new reading audience which had not previously been in the market for book buying.

Klaus Müller-Wille further pursues the focus on book trade and materiality in his investigation of J. L. Heiberg and Søren Kierkegaard in the first half of the nineteenth century. Both had a highly developed sense of the emerging book trade, which they evoked as a thematic and aesthetic point of reference. Both authors (more or less willingly) embraced this material condition of the intellectual enterprise.

As his two main examples, Müller-Wille looks at Kierkegaard's *Forord* (1844) and Heiberg's *Ny A-B-C-Bog* (1817), disclosing a range of intertextual references in both. Kierkegaard's polemic satire is aimed at the book trade in general and at Heiberg in particular. Müller-Wille demonstrates how Kierkegaard's highly critical view-

point – in this and other works – is supplemented by a finely-tuned employment of the very same features he criticises in Heiberg and others.

In Heiberg's *ABC*, typography and other bibliographic codes are used more expressively in a polemic discussion with N. F. S. Grundtvig. The *ABC* is a highly graphical publication and the link to book aesthetics is therefore evident. But Müller-Wille goes on to disclose more hidden references to the book trade in other works by Heiberg. Thus the essay very effectively demonstrates the central doctrine of book history: intellectual content and material form must always be viewed as a whole. Without the material perspective, the two controversies discussed would make little sense.

Petra Söderlund demonstrates how the history of a publishing house – A. F. Palmblad & Co., based in Uppsala in the early nineteenth century – is also a literary history. Swedish romanticism and, in particular, the so-called *phosphorism*, was closely linked to Palmblad. Söderlund's contribution is a fine example of the Uppsala school where an investigation of the sociology of texts is the main methodological approach. The essay focuses on the importance of the (social) network, the strong ties and co-operation between publishers and writers, and the influence of readership and financial considerations on aesthetic production. Söderlund makes the interesting point that the development of romanticism in Sweden was particularly influenced by the limitations of the commercial book trade during the early nineteenth century. As romantic publications

did not sell well, Palmblad had to rely on other genres in order to raise the financial capital needed, while accumulating *cultural* capital. According to Söderlund, this was a conscious strategy by Palmblad. Here one discovers an interesting clash between the idealised view of the Swedish romantic movement with its (divinely) inspired artists conjuring up the work of art in solitude and the practical, financial influence of the book trade.

Simon Frost examines the publication history of *Robinson Crusoe* and shows how various editions have prompted different interpretations of the work. His essay demonstrates the importance of distinguishing between the work *per se* and its various editions, copies, and versions.

Defoe's three-volume novel was first published in 1719–1720 and quickly became a commercial success. Frost's essay relates how the translation practices of the romantic era ('transediting', to borrow a term from book history) transformed the story. Translations would often abbreviate and focus on the Island episode that resonated better with romantic ideologies of man and nature than did the rest of the work. Also, translations would often discard the author's name and become in fact rewritten versions. Thus began the wave of Robinsonades that rushed over the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. However, as Frost shows, deviations from the original were not seen as untruthful to the original, but as an imaginative recreation with the aim of delivering the unreleased potential of the work.

Robert W. Rix focuses on how the

cultural, political, and religious climate of England in the 1790s prompted the publisher Joseph Johnson to terminate the publication of a poem *The French Revolution* by William Blake, a work that now only exists in a single incomplete proof copy.

Johnson was a central figure in both the reformist movement and in early English romanticism. Like many others, he was supportive of the revolution in France and had published in support of it. Blake's work therefore seemed conducive. However, the difference in perspective between Blake and Johnson was too great. Rix traces in detail how Blake's poem was too visionary and prophetic, bordering on the fanatic, whereas Johnson's publications of the Unitarian Joseph Priestly and others would stay within a scholarly exegetical approach. Blake was in a sense too romantic.

In Johnson's view, releasing a work of this kind would jeopardise his position as publisher in the intensified political climate of the time. Rix's essay beautifully demonstrates how cultural, historical, material, and literary studies come together and effectively enrich our understanding of the work, the author, and the cultural dynamics of the early romantic era in England.

In Peter Simonsen's essay, romantic ideas of the sublime are coupled with the notion of textual instability. The latter is a fundamental concept in textual criticism and modern book history, stating that works of literature often exist in different versions and that no *one* version can be said to be authoritative. Simonsen takes as his example a poem by Samuel

Taylor Coleridge and claims that the poet deliberately employs revision as a means of poetic expression. The poem – ‘Frost at Midnight’ – was written and first published in 1798. By 1834 it had been published in ten substantially different versions although the essay only discusses the two versions extant by 1807.

Simonsen not only considers the different versions of Coleridge’s poem. More importantly, he examines the tension between the two. In a discussion of how the versions have previously been valorised by Coleridge scholars, he asserts that it is not a question of which is better, but of what each version means in relation to the other.

Whether the case really represents a chaos of variants as is stated, is difficult to say. The article does not provide sufficient information on the

textual transmission of the poem, but using the theories of Jerome McGann, it does assert that textual differences matter – whatever the scholarly approach might be. This conclusion cannot be overstated.

The essays in this volume are well-written and well-edited. The combination of Scandinavian and English case studies works well, even though is it not made to bear any particular, comparative argument. The essays also maintain a fine balance between the material and the literary perspective, and equal emphasis is important in cross-disciplinary studies. In charting selected blank areas of the literary map, this book is highly recommendable and should be employed in university curricula.

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