Johannes V. Jensen (1873-1950)

*Dean Krouk, St. Olaf College*

Photograph of Jensen in 1902 from

<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/cb/Johannes_V_Jensen_1902.jpg>

<http://ia600800.us.archive.org/zipview.php?zip=/30/items/olcovers578/olcovers578-L.zip&file=5780669-L.jpg> First edition of *Den gotiske Renaissance*, 1901.

<http://www.e-poke.dk/billeder/braen-va-st.gif> Edition og *Bræen* from 1911.

<http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-PQei1VdZKyU/TzFHzdccdiI/AAAAAAAAJ7w/XbCz9RiW7BA/s1600/JohannesVJensen-bue-pil.jpg> Photograph of Jensen with bow and arrow

<http://www.denstoredanske.dk/@api/deki/files/13849/=24056172.jpg?size=webview>

*Photograph of Johannes V. Jensen in the 1930s.*

Winner of the 1944 Nobel Prize in literature, the novelist and poet Johannes V. Jensen was Denmark’s major twentieth-century literary figure. Much celebrated for his historical novel *Kongens Fald* [*The Fall of the King,* 1900-01], Jensen also penned the poetry collection *Digte 1906* [*Poems 1906*], which had a substantial influence on Scandinavian modernism.

Jensen was born in Farsø, in the northern part of Denmark’s Jutland peninsula. While a medical student in Copenhagen, Jensen wrote *Danskere* (1896)and *Einar Elkjær* (1898), pessimistic fin-de-siècle novels about provincial men made neurotic and decadent by life in the metropolis. In contrast to these urban works, Jensen began to publish sketches and tales of vigorous farm life from his home region called *Himmerlandshistorier* (1898, 1904, 1910), which he saw as the true beginning of his literary career.

Jensen’s wide travels in Europe, Asia, and the United States left a mark on his cultural, aesthetic, and anthropological interests. He encountered the new marvels of technology and industry at the Paris World’s Exhibition in 1900, which he described in *Den gotiske Renaissance* (1901), a collection of travel reportage that calls for a new, vigorous aesthetics and psychology to match the modern age.

In 1900-1901, Jensen published the three-part novel *The Fall of the King*, generally considered his most important work. In sensual and graceful language, this historical novel tells the story of man named Mikkel Thøgersen, who lives during the reign of Denmark’s Christian II in the early 1500s. Both Mikkel and the king are dreamers incapable of decisive action – for Jensen this was a Danish pathology. *The Fall of the King* offers a tragic-pessimistic counterpoint to the progressive optimism and futuristic enthusiasm for modern technology found in Jensen’s travel reportage of the time.

With the influential *Digte 1906*, Jensen introduced free verse into Danish poetry. This collection contains the well-known poems “Paa Memphis Station” and “Interferens”, as well as Jensen’s translations of poems by Walt Whitman. Over the course of his career, Jensen also employed a genre of his own invention called “myth”, which blends observation and narrative in concentrated and intense glimpses of human experiences throughout history. In the interwar period, Jensen continued to publish in multiple genres, translating Old Norse literature and writing poetry, novels, “myths”, and essays on wide-ranging subjects from art history to ethnography. His most significant later work is the historical novel cycle *Den lange Rejse* (1908-1923), a vast anthropological narrative that traces the biological and cultural evolution of mankind from the Ice Age to the discovery of the Americas.

Selected Works:

*Kongens Fald* (1900-1901)

*Den gotiske Renaissance* (1901)

*Digte 1906* (1906)

*Den lange Rejse*:

*Bræen* (1908)

*Skibet* (1912)

*Norne-Gæst* (1919)

*Det tabte Land* (1919)

*Christofer Columbus* (1921)

*Cimbrernes Tog* (1923)

*Samlede Digte*. Eds. Erik M. Christensen, Per Dahl, Aage Jørgensen. Copenhagen, Gyldendal, 2006.

Translations:

*The Long Journey.* Trans. Arthur G. Chater. London, Gyldendal, 1922-1924.

*The Fall of the King*. Trans. Alan G. Bower. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

Secondary Literature:

Rossel, Sven Hakon. *Johannes V. Jensen*. Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1984.

Holk, Iben. *Jærtegn: et essay om Johannes V. Jensens myter*. Copenhagen, C. A. Reitzel, 2000.

Handesten, Lars. *Johannes V. Jensen: liv og værk.* Copenhagen, Gyldendal, 2000.