Jonas Lie (1833-1908)

*Dean Krouk, St. Olaf College*

Portrait of Jonas Lie, 1908: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Jonas_Lie_ITokt1908.jpg>

Letter from Jonas Lie, 1865: <http://www.nb.no/utlevering/nb/211625626878f03c4b7d0ad3ca08fe2e>

<http://www.e-tidsskrifter.dk/ojs/tidsskrift-dk/fund-og-forskning/imgtid/ffo_2003_42_0220_1.jpg>

First Edition of *Gaa Paa!*, 1888.

<http://www.e-tidsskrifter.dk/ojs/tidsskrift-dk/fund-og-forskning/imgtid/ffo_2003_42_0198_1.jpg>

First Edition of *Et Samliv*, 1887.

<http://www.nrk.no/skole/klippdetalj?topic=nrk:klipp/276578>

Clip about Jonas Lie’s Letters (Norwegian)

<http://media.snl.no/system/images/l/liejonas_med_thommasine.jpg>

Jonas Lie with his wife Thomasine in 1903.

Jonas Lie was a leading Norwegian novelist during the Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough, a period of literary realism and naturalism spanning 1870 to 1890. His major novels of the 1880s employ impressionistic narrative techniques to portray social changes in the process of modernization, especially regarding the status of women.

Though born in southern Norway in 1833, Lie spent his childhood in the northern coastal town of Tromsø. During his time as a law student in Christiania (now Oslo), Lie took part in the capital’s intellectual life, publishing poetry and journalism on international events. He emerged in the 1860s as an advocate of progressive liberal politics*.*

Lie’s first novel, *Den Fremsynte* (1870), was about a visionary outsider in a northern Norwegian coastal location. The following year was a watershed moment in Scandinavian literary history. In a Copenhagen lecture series, the Danish intellectual Georg Brandes announced the literary program of the Modern Breakthrough, making his influential demand for a tendentious literature of social debate. Although Lie became associated with this movement, he was never fully aligned with Brandes’ goals. Lie thought that the indirect effects of literary texts were more important than overt socio-political criticism, and this put his impressionistic narrative art at odds with the standard Modern Breakthrough paradigm of critical realism.

Lie left Norway in 1878 for a quarter-century abroad in Germany and France. In collaboration with his wife Thomasine, he produced his most important work during this period. His naturalistic 1883 novel*, Livsslaven* [*One of Life’s Slaves*], depicts the Christiania working class, recounting the fatherless Nikolai’s vain attempt to overcome his impoverished circumstances. He becomes a criminal when he kills his bourgeois love rival, succumbing to the corrupt environment that has determined him.

In *Familjen paa Gilje: et Interieur fra Firtiaarene* [*The Family at Gilje: A Domestic Story from the Forties*], also from 1883, Lie perfected his impressionistic narrative technique in vivid sketches of everyday life, using episodic shifts in perspective to evoke a range of characters. Set in the home of a Norwegian army officer, the novel showcases Lie’s interest in women’s emancipation and the conflict of progressive and traditional worldviews in a modernizing society*.* A later novel from the same decade, *Kommandørens Døttre* [*The Commodore’s Daughters*], again focuses on conflicts between individual autonomy and social duties, with more troubling messages about progress for women.

Around 1890, Lie turned his artistic eye to darker depths of the psyche and used his longstanding interest in northern legends and lore to explore the irrational, mainly in the two volumes of *Trold* [*Trolls*]. From the turn of the century until his death in 1908, Lie continued to develop these themes, while also returning to the impressionistic domestic interiors of his earlier work.

Selected Works

*Samlede verker*. Ninth edition. Oslo, Gyldendal, 1995.

*Livsslaven* (1883)

*Familjen paa Gilje: et Interieur fra Firtiaarene* (1883)

*Kommandørens Døttre* (1886)

*Trold* (1891-1892)

Translations

*One of Life’s Slaves*. Trans. Jesse Muir. London, Hodder Brothers, 1895.

*Weird Tales from Northern Seas*. Trans. R. Nisbet Bain. Iowa City, Penfield Press, 1996.

*The Family at Gilje.* Trans. Marie Wells. Dufour Editions, 2012.

Secondary literature:

Lyngstad, Sverre. *Jonas Lie.* Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1977.

Aaslestad, Petter. *Dømt til kunst: Jonas Lies romaner, 1884-1905*. Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, 1992.