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| **Obstfelder, Sigbjørn (1866-1900)** |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Sigbjørn Obstfelder is considered the first Norwegian modernist writer. He wrote poetry, dramas and novels but is primarily known for his collection of poems, *Digte* (1893, *Poems*). He was inspired by Charles Baudelaire and French Symbolism, and experimented with prose poetry and with the musical quality of language. His works are characterised by a tension between contrasting themes, such as togetherness and solitude, inebriation and anxiety. He had a tormented life with an unstable mental health and died of tuberculosis in Copenhagen at the age of 34.  Born in Stavanger into a large family of modest means, Obstfelder received a rather strict religious upbringing. |
| Sigbjørn Obstfelder is considered the first Norwegian modernist writer. He wrote poetry, dramas and novels but is primarily known for his collection of poems, *Digte* (1893, *Poems*). He was inspired by Charles Baudelaire and French Symbolism, and experimented with prose poetry and with the musical quality of language. His works are characterised by a tension between contrasting themes, such as togetherness and solitude, inebriation and anxiety. He had a tormented life with an unstable mental health and died of tuberculosis in Copenhagen at the age of 34.  Born in Stavanger into a large family of modest means, Obstfelder received a rather strict religious upbringing. In the 1880s he became interested in the bohemian movement in Oslo, called Kristiania-Bohemen, though he never completely shared its members’ life style, which openly challenged the norms of bourgeoisie society. In 1890 he moved to the USA but, after a rather disappointing stay, he travelled back to Norway already in 1891. In the same year he suffered a breakdown and entered a mental asylum, where he stayed for a few months. His restlessness drove him to travel extensively around Europe, visiting European capitals such as Paris, Brussels and Copenhagen.  In 1892 Obstfelder was encouraged to pursue his literary career by the Norwegian author Vilhelm Krag. Obstfelder’s works are typical examples of fin de siècle literature of the 1890s. His works are characterised by a feeling of anxiety, solitude and alienation as well as by an interest in new experimental forms. He is mainly known for his poetry, in which he abandoned rhymed verse in favour of free verse and created new connections between the written word and sound. All these aspects can be found in his first collection of poems, *Poems*  – which was directly inspired by Baudelaire’s prose poems *Petit poèmes* – and, in particular, in his most iconic poem ‘Jeg ser’. Obstfelder’s works were praised by the Danish Symbolists, gathering around the Danish author Johannes Jørgensen and the journal *Taarnet* (1893-1895).  Although he continued to publish poetry in journals and newspapers, after his debut collection Obstfelder started to experiment with other genres. His novel *Korset* (1896) became his most successful work economically. His *En prests dagbog* (1900, *A Priest’s Diary*), where the narrator takes up religious issues and tries to respond to the challenges of his contemporary society, was only published posthumously. Obstfelder also produced three dramas, *De røde drabber* (1897), *Esther* (1899) and *Om våren* (1902), which was performed at the National Theatre in Oslo in 1902.  File: Obstfelder.jpg  Figure 1. Sigbjørn Obstfelder from 1900  Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5b/Portrett\_av\_Sigbj%C3%B8rn\_  Obstfelder%2C\_1900.jpg>  File: Portrait.jpg  Figure 2. Obstfelder's famous portrait from 1896 painted by Edvard Munch  Copyright: The National Museum in Oslo, <photo@nasjonalmuseet.no>  Source: <http://digitaltmuseum.no/011042411436#&gid=1&pid=1> Complete Works *Samlede Skrifter* I-III (2000). Gyldendal: Oslo – a new edition of the original publication from 1950 edited by Solveig Tunold List of Works *Digte* (1893)  *To novelletter* (1895)  *Korset* (1896)  *De røde drabber* (1897)  *Esther* (1899)  *En prests dagbog* (1900)  *Om våren* (1902)  *Efterladte Arbeider* (1903) Translations (1920) *Poems from the Norwegian of Sigbjørn Obstfelder*. Sheldonian series of reprints and rendering of masterpieces, vol. 6. Oxford: Blackwell.  (1987) *A Priest’s Diary*, *translated and with an introduction by James McFarlane*. Norwich: Norvik Press. |
| Further reading:  (Aarnes)  (Andersen)  (Gunsilius)  (Nag) |