

**Ian Giles, ed. Scandinavia Refracted. A Festschrift in Honour of
Bjarne Thorup Thomsen**

Brynjarr Perry Mendoza

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Ian Giles, ed. 2022. *Scandinavia Refracted. A Festschrift in Honour of Bjarne Thorup Thomsen*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Society for Northern Studies. 365 pages. ISBN: 978-1-3999-3524-1.

The process of refraction involves the bending of light as it passes through a new medium, leading to the formation of new perspectives and, in the case of the related phenomenon of rainbows, producing a thing of beauty. In a similar sense, *Scandinavia Refracted* offers new perspectives of interest that also disperse praises for the esteemed scholar Bjarne Thorup Thomsen. The many prisms of the festschrift investigate different thematic strands that connect to both Bjarne's research and his teaching.

The festschrift begins with a brief glimpse into the life of Bjarne—as he is so fondly called by his colleagues in the book—a scholar and astute observer of the processes of becoming, relationality, and movement in Nordic literature. This introduction is followed by sections that echo the theme of refractions: “Representations of Scandinavia,” “A Literary Lens on Scandinavia,” “The Many Faces of Denmark,” “Understanding Scandinavia,” and finally “A Life in Print.” Scholarly articles are interspersed with notes of thanks and anecdotes of fond memories with Bjarne.

As far as festschrifts go, there is some deep erudition to be discovered by the reader of *Scandinavia Refracted*. Its topics are many and the history it spans is long. Discussions range from Arne Kruse's contribution on runes in Scandinavia to Anja Tröger's article on Vigdis Hjorth, and the book evaluates different points of contact that run through Nordic countries, the British Isles (Scotland, in particular), and mainland Europe. The lengths of the contributions vary greatly, and the same may be said about their scholarliness. This, however, is not an exacting criticism of the book, as it is precisely in its variety and range that the festschrift stands out. Its diversity of voices and topics can prove alluring to any reader interested in the history, literature, and culture of the Nordic region as well as further afield.

Through this vast expanse of refracted perspectives, too, readers can find points with which to connect the book's immense trekking of spaces of history and literature. For example, Jane Garton's chapter on Amalie Schram's travel writing complements C. Claire Thompson's thorough discussion of the railway film, as Schram is described to suffer “train phobia” (114). Garton traces Schram's life through her writing as she moves about between Norway and Denmark as well as mainland Europe and describes her quests for mobility and belonging in great detail. Barbara Tesio-Ryan similarly investigates the writings and speeches of two women who are no less revolutionary than Schram in the

Nordic region: Selma Lagerlöf and Karen Blixen. She examines these two figures in light of the feminist movements in which their writings belonged or from which these stood out. Despite some differences in the approach of the two writers to feminism, Tesio-Ryan notes similar attitudes towards “mutual collaboration” for the benefit of society (124). Her paper, writes Tesio-Ryan, draws its inspiration from Bjarne’s work in *Re-Mapping Lagerlöf* (140).

Likewise, Henk van der Liet re-maps conceptualisations of space in Denmark through cultural narratives. In particular, he re-examines the element of “insularity” (231) in Danish cultural identity that, he argues, sheds light on the country’s “versatility” (237). He sees the formation of a new aesthetics in the work of Sigurd Buch Kristensen that reinvigorates perceptions of islands and insularity in Denmark. Far from being negative places of isolation, islands, as van der Liet sees in Kristensen, are spaces that preserve sensations of nature and the past that have now become somewhat foreign to the modern reader (251). Many of the other essays in this festschrift also re-map the spaces where aesthetics meets history and creative forces contend with or echo the wide world of politics. In this lies the book’s strengths, as it captures vibrant strands of perspectives and refracts them into further portraits of interest.

In reading *Scandinavia Refracted*, one immediately encounters the intellectual spirit of Bjarne as a pioneer of widespread interests reverberating through the contributions. There are a total of twenty-four pieces of writing included in this book, and one can easily appreciate how difficult—and no doubt pleasurable—it must have been to put together such a compilation. That at least twenty-four authors are willing to write even a few words of gratitude to Bjarne is high praise for a scholar and mentor whose influence bridges countries whose spaces might otherwise be considered as isolated and marginal. Indeed, the praises in this volume are rightfully bountiful, and numerous chapters trace their roots to Bjarne’s teachings and patient supervision. As Anna Bohlin writes: “When does it happen that literally all the contributors of an anthology explicitly ask you, as the editor, to convey their sincere gratitude to the anonymous peer reviewer? Only when Bjarne is your peer” (116).

As mentioned in the beginning of this review, refraction produces a thing of beauty. While the perspectives presented in the festschrift are various, they are focused in their attention to Scandinavia, and the tributes to Bjarne are likewise singular in their object of praise. The festschrift’s strengths lie in its kaleidoscopic variety, as many of its contributors offer fresh approaches to historical and contemporary topics that tie to Bjarne’s fields of interest. It is as diverse as the careers of the twenty-four contributors themselves, a fact in which Bjarne doubtless plays no small role. And that is certainly a thing of beauty too.

Brynjarr Perry Mendoza
University of Turku, 2024