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A. M. Kinghorn

Robert Burns's Danish Translator:
Jeppe Aakjaer (1866–1930)



Jeppe Aakjær was one of a group of original writers from Jutland whose talents were directed to painting the depressed lives of peasants in their native countryside, as they laboured in village and field. He was born into an unsophisticated world, remote from other parts of Europe and severely limited in vision. There the Jutland labouring class represented what amounted to a race apart, apathetic, further separated from the rest of Danish society by seemingly insurmountable class differences, without prospect of change and lacking in interests that might enable them to enjoy what scant leisure might come their way after the day's work was done. Fictional accounts give even the farm animals superiority over the men of these isolated areas and other members of the same literary group, e.g., Johannes V. Jensen, Jakob Knudsen and Johan Skjoldborg, each in his distinct way, ranging from the brutal to the imaginative and fantastic, bring this hopeless existence alive with glaring intensity. The one common factor linking them all was their concentration on their Jutland background; for a parallel one may look to Gorki or, more appropriately in this context, to Lewis Grassic Gibbon, though the latter's Mearns is cheerful in comparison with Vestjylland.

The hamlet of Aakjær (*lit.* "river-marsh") from which the author took his surname lay in one of the poorest parts of a

Facing Page: Holograph MS of early draft of "There Was a Lad" reproduced by kind permission of the Curator, Manuscript Department, Royal Library, Copenhagen. The English translation appears below.

There was a lad, was born in Kyle
but to affirm with wax and seal
~~but day and date, if right, if wrong~~
what day, what indeed, do not bestir yourself
~~has value [?] worth a button [?] [lit. with the back of~~
 your nail]
and use your wax and seal for other things
~~when the talk is of~~ Robin
than to have such trouble for
 grows up
For Robin ~~was~~ an active lad

O mighty active, strong and active,
 grows up
Robin ~~was~~ an active lad,
 mighty
a ~~strong and~~ active Robin

[This was further developed in the final version, "Burns om sig selv," Stanza 1 of which appears in the *Collected Poems* with lines 2-4 altered to:

Don't worry about day and date
Save your ink, your seal and wax
About Robin's baptismal certificate.]

poor country and he himself was brought up under primitive conditions as one of a family of eight born to the plough on his father's small holding 10 km south of Skive, a sparsely-populated environment. This harsh upbringing he held in common with Robert Burns and, like Burns also, he stood out from his fellows because of his natural intelligence. He was attracted to folklore and poetry, became a keen reader of history, and while still in his teens arrived at the conclusion that certain other areas of Northern Europe, particularly Lowland Scotland, shared many of the lamentable characteristics of the stricken land which, as a real son of the soil, Aakjær knew intimately from his earliest days.

His biographers describe his young awakenings, education and early success as a poet and writer of fiction, biography and criticism. Born Jeppe Jensen on 10th September, 1866,² he was fortunate in his first teacher, Niels Jakobsen of Fly parish, Viborg county, who perceived his potentialities and helped him to gain the attention of local worthies. Their financial aid gave him the opportunity to escape from the deadly pattern which absorbed his less-talented fellows. The boy attended Staby High School and then Blågård Seminarium (Seminary), a teacher-training college in Copenhagen. He passed the *Præliminæreksamen* in 1886 but did not complete the course. After working as a pupil-teacher in Jutland he returned to Copenhagen and passed his *Studentereksamen* (Baccalaureate) in 1895. Although the capital was not to his liking he found nourishment there for his growing political radicalism, at that time an unpopular ideology. He gained a reputation for rebelliousness and as early as 1887 earned a short sentence of detention for making fiery speeches denouncing the authorities--an incident which recalls Burns's public rebuke of 1786.

Aakjær continued to be a university student of history until 1897, when financial pressures forced him to give up his formal candidature. In the meantime, he had found his future wife, Marie Bregendahl (1867-1940), a Jutland crofter's daughter who became as well-known a novelist as Aakjær himself. After his marriage in 1893 he worked at various jobs ranging from proof-reading to teaching while his wife kept a *pension*. The couple was always short of ready cash and he was glad to pick up small fees from correspondence with provincial newspapers, notably the *Vestjyllands Socialdemokrat*: it was in these journals that several of his versions of Robert Burns's poems and songs first appeared. After 1897 he devoted himself entirely to writing, mainly poetry and biographical novels describing his youth in Jutland--*Bondens Søn* (Son of the Soil) of 1897 was a success and reinforced his already-growing reputation made as a lyrical poet, marking a new realistic awaken-

ing in Danish poetry which had previously been heavily influenced by French classical styles. His marriage broke down and was dissolved in 1900. Seven years later he remarried. His second wife was an artist, Nanna Krog, who survived him and died in 1962.

Aakjær's output was prolific and by the time of his remarriage he had achieved fame in Denmark not only as a novelist and poet but also as a biographer, essayist and editor of anthologies. His best-known collection of poems, *Rugens Sange* (Songs of the Rye) which appeared in 1906, sold 56,000 copies. *Livstragedie*, (1903-4), a 3-volume biographical study of the author Steen Steensen Blicher, was followed by a series of socio-realistic novels published between 1904 and 1927 depicting the spiritless destiny of Jutland peasants as he remembered it from the days of his own youth, latterly a vanished type of existence. The first and the last of these works, *Vredens Børn* (Children of Wrath) of 1904 and *Under Aftenstjærnen* (Beneath the Evening Star) of 1927 are considered to be his best. His *Collected Poems*, which appeared posthumously, run to three large volumes. Aakjær's prose still awaits translation into English and his name is unknown outside Denmark, where, apart from two long vacations spent in Scotland, he spent almost all his time. He travelled a great deal within his own country giving lectures on literature and history, including many talks on Burns and Scotland. In 1907 he himself built a farmhouse on the east coast of Salling by the Limfjord which he named "Jenle" (Hermitage);³ there he lived and worked, indoors and out, for well over twenty years and his summer literary gatherings became famous. It was in the garden of "Jenle" that he died, of a heart attack, on 22nd April, 1930. Both he and his wife lie buried on the property and the house itself, now occupied by Aakjær's daughter, remains as he left it, with his workroom and study intact and open during the summer months to the interested public. The library contains many Scottish items, including a copy of the 1787 Edinburgh edition of Burns's poems, presented to Aakjær in 1928, but the edition which he used for his translations is not in the "Jenle" collection and must be presumed lost following the domestic upheaval which preceded the break-up of his first marriage.

To explain Aakjær's value as a translator is undoubtedly easier if the reader has some knowledge of Danish, a language spoken as a native language by fewer than three million people in his time, and not widely understood in the world beyond Scandinavia, including the international academic world. The main interest for students of Burns will presumably be in the influence which he exercised on a Danish writer working more than a century after his death. Nevertheless, to estimate the

nature and value of Aakjær's versions, which aimed to carry over both the spirit and the letter of Burns's verses and to be poems themselves in their own right, some linguistic and philological comment is unavoidable, but the fact that Aakjær and others have discovered affinities between Scots and Danish should make such comparisons (brought in to enlighten rather than to embellish) less opaque to a non-reader of Danish. Translations of Danish ballads into Scots, e.g., by Sir Alexander Gray, and recent scholarly contributions on the subject of the mediæval associations of Danish and Scots is evidence of a continued interest in this area of comparative literature.

Before he was twenty, Aakjær had got to know Burns's poems. The effect of this initial encounter was galvanic. Many years later, he recounted the incident, which took place on a Sunday morning in May, 1886, when Aakjær was seated on a plough near his father's croft. While the distant church bells pealed their summons he was immersed in Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-Worship* in a Danish translation and came across the essay on Burns (which at that time was highly regarded in literary circles). Having set the scene for his "live" audience, Aakjær went on to describe his emotions as he recollected them, so to speak, "in tranquillity."

The sublimity and force of the book together with the peace and beauty of the scenery came to me with the suddenness and ecstasy of a revelation. I felt the deep quiver that seizes the astronomer when he suddenly discovers a star of the first order, and I made the promise to myself that I would not rest until I had gathered the treasures that had been put into my view. And now there came years of intense study and the work of learning a foreign language--nay, even a foreign dialect, and foreign languages never have been easy for me to learn--but in ten years of my life Burns was the personage who mostly engaged my thoughts. His poetry fascinated me, his fortune moved me by its simplicity and tragedy--I thirsted to visit the country that had produced the poet who, more than any other, had stirred the flame of poetry in my heart.⁴

This flashback is cast in what might be considered an excessively sentimental style, suggesting the prose of some of Burns's more impassioned letters, but in Danish it is less open to accusation of overdone rhetoric and conveys naturally and accurately the exaltation felt by a partly self-taught farmer's boy. But, whatever its received effect, there is no doubting the enthusiasm with which Aakjær worshipped his new-found deity.

He managed to teach himself, first English grammar, then enough of Lowland Scots to enable him to render Burns into Danish. He thought that he could detect a particular affinity between the Scots vernacular as adapted by Burns (*skotsk*) and the Jutlandic dialect of Danish (*jysk*) and like his older native contemporary Steen Blicher, (who translated James Macpherson's *Ossian*) Aakjær saw the inhabitants of West Jutland as being descendants from an original *Folk* of pure stock who possessed an original language. Indeed, the dialect with which Aakjær grew up seemed sufficiently unlike educated Danish to make such a romantic view plausible to him. Blicher's geographical investigations informed Aakjær that topographical and cultural similarities, combined with economic decline, had produced parallel results in both *skotsk* and *jysk*.⁵ The Scots dialect or "Doric," especially in one of its several literary forms, was disparaged by many Edinburgh writers and speakers who sought their models of "polite" English in London, just as *jysk* was scorned by the sophisticated *litterati* of Copenhagen whose spiritual home was to be discovered in Berlin.

Aakjær himself took a long time to master his own dialect inheritance, and his initial handling of it is clumsy. His mentor and friend, the Danish folklorist Evald Tang Kristensen, whom he assisted in the 1880s by submitting versions of West Jutland legends, criticised Aakjær's earlier attempts at writing dialect prose for being so stilted and pedantic as to be far removed from the realities of contemporary speech. In 1923 Aakjær published his original collection of stories under the title *Po f'ir glowend Pæl*, (On four glowing Pillars), but with the dialect thoroughly revised and greatly improved, even to Tang Kristensen's satisfaction. Aakjær's selective use of *jysk* in serious writing made him a pioneer in Danish literature, though his Scots counterpart is not Burns but Allan Ramsay, whose poems Aakjær came to know in course of time. Many biographical accounts of Aakjær's work give the impression that he translated Burns into the Jutland dialect, but in fact only one song, "Auld Lang Syne," the Dane's last published attempt to recreate Burns's Scots, is rendered closely into *jysk*. All the others are rendered into standard Danish with an occasional dialect word, phrase or idiom interposed where the exact sense requires it, together with a handful of archaic or old-fashioned terms still current in Denmark around the turn of the century. Aakjær employed these when he wished to grasp Scots rustic terms for which no adequate equivalent could be found in the contemporary Danish lexicons. As a local patriot, Aakjær felt that *jysk* was as worthy of attention as any other minor language or diminishing dialect and opposed pressures from modern industrial society to obliterate traditional

culture characteristics. He was especially hostile to any tendency to reduce *jysk* speakers to what he thought was the dead linguistic level of the rest of the country, namely, the standard Danish rooted in the dialects of eastern Sjælland (Zeeland). In all his writings Aakjær laboured to find the word or expression not worn smooth by too much previous handling and it is this that imparts to his work a marked stamp of originality.

Aakjær's first attempts to turn Burns into Danish were printed in 1897, his last in 1922. The *Collected Poems* contains 21 such renderings, ranging from close translation to versions which "take off" into paraphrase; Aakjær was drawn to Burns's songs by hearing the airs played by local fiddlers,⁶ but the Burns who first attracted him was the radical young poet of the 1780's whose recalcitrant attitudes he shared and, on a more intimate level, the downtrodden figure depicted at the beginning of Carlyle's essay which was founded upon Burns's own account of himself as a man who knew that "he must live and die poor." However, most of the versions are taken from songs. The *Collected Poems* provides dates of composition and place of initial publication, commencing with "I det Fjerne" (Over the Seas and Far Away) in 1897. With the exception of "Skuld gammel venskab rejn forgo" (Should Auld Acquaintance be Forgotten) all those published were made by 1902, four years before he actually set foot in Scotland. Near the end of his life Aakjær noted in his *Recollections* how he had started translating from Burns in the late 1890s:

Between 1898-99 I translated fully half a hundred pieces; at that time I read mostly lyric poems, especially social lyrics which were so lacking in our own literature⁷

but of these "half a hundred" all that remain are the 21 printed in the *Collected Poems*, the separate version of "Auld Lang Syne" and a fragment of "Tam O'Shanter," discovered by the present writer among Aakjær's notes in his study at "Jenle."

Aakjær's three-month trip to Scotland, financed by an unexpected legacy, took him to Lochlea, the farm where Burns lived from 1777-84, and to the Scots poet's birthplace, Alloway, two miles from Ayr, as well as to Edinburgh and its environs. In his *Recollections* he explained why he had decided to make the journey.

I really went to Scotland principally on account of Robert Burns, and I wasn't disappointed. I found in Scotland a good deal of the old Jutland in great measure.

Of all European countries none has ever interested me as much. If Jutland were raised to God's Heaven, it would look as it does there⁸

and his account of this visit has been several times reprinted. Some of Aakjær's hints to future travellers are very lively, recalling the pungent wit of the Reverend Sidney Smith. Contrasting the Scottish Sabbath with the rest of the week, he wrote:

Do not go to Scotland on a Sunday. On that day, it is apparently a joy to every orthodox Scotsman to see you hungering and enduring all the pains of thirst for the sake of your sinfulness...but on a weekday...you will find a stirring mood whose equal you must seek in southern Europe, nay, as far away as in Naples⁹

and he observed local manners as closely as any 18th-century traveller north of the Border had done. The Dane's sympathies were much engaged with the neglected and harassed Burns of the early days, before the publication of the second (Edinburgh) edition, and above all with the manner in which, although a great poet, he had been allowed to die poor, honoured belatedly in stone. His reaction to Burns's birthplace and to the "shrine" much frequented by worshippers of the long-dead Bard, was one of grave disappointment, for he could not help but compare the conditions under which Burns had lived and died with the extravagance of later purchasers of relics.

Aakjær's deep-rooted sense of injustice, akin to Burns's own, was continually stirred by inequities such as these and by the miserable lot of poets like Fergusson, to whose memory Burns himself had a memorial erected. Three poems which Aakjær wrote in Scotland, "Robert Burns," "Lochlea," and "Burns's Birthplace" all contain a strong note of indignation originating in the Dane's recent pilgrimage, and he blames "Scotland's lairds" for condemning a Heaven-sent genius to thresh the barley¹⁰ and the people as a whole for letting their national poet die "as a poor customs man" heartbroken and alone.¹¹ Only after he was dead did they commemorate his genius in stone, as is always the lot of the martyr. The sentiments are hardly novel, but Aakjær was not just striking an attitude and these verses record his contempt for the commercial exploitation of Burns's memory.

More illuminating is his reference to Alloway as the birthplace of Burns's inspiration to make song. Alloway, he said, was the source of the authentic sound of folk-music:

Her sprang Folkesangen klinger
 frem af Skotlands Grund og Stene,
 munter som Forellen springer
 under Flodens Askegrene.

Here arose the folksong, ringing
 Forth from Scotland's earth and rock,
 Leaping joyous as the trout
 Under the river's ashen branches¹²

and he was fascinated because more than any other Danish poet Aakjær drew upon the national folk tradition, which was especially powerful in Jutland and stretches back to the late Middle Ages. Aakjær's folklorist friend Tang Kristensen discovered over five hundred folk-singers in Jutland and over a period of fifty years from 1870-1920 wrote down their songs. Moreover, the language of the most important ballad manuscript of the Danish Middle Ages, Karen Brahe's 1570 Folio, is Jutlandic. Aakjær always felt himself to be a part of this ancient heritage and later stated that he as a folklorist preferred to revive older styles rather than try to create anything novel, since he believed that this was what people really wanted.¹³ He compared his own methods with those of Burns and his countrymen Blicher and Drachmann and the Norwegian poet Bjørnson, who employed the forms of the Danish *folkeviser* or folksongs. These are often called "ballads" by literary historians though properly speaking the ballad is a mediæval *genre* and only one of numerous types of folksong.¹⁴

The Danish *folkeviser* favoured repetition of theme or regular repetition of a refrain. Another characteristic typical of the *vise* is a regular return to a proper name, usually that of the personage at the centre of attention or to whom the song is addressed, but--and here is the significant point--although this form is well-known in Danish tradition Aakjær's immediate model is Burns, as he reveals in an early diary of the 1890's. "Thanks to Robert Burns, I am finding the authentic Jutland note" he wrote, adding that he spent ten years in developing a poetic consciousness.¹⁵ Burns provided Aakjær with the example he needed of plain style and musical form, which Burns himself discovered in the traditional Scots song, itself largely of 17th-century origin (at least in the form in which Burns and his predecessors knew it). Aakjær's pilgrimage to Ayrshire was made several years after his versions of Burns had been composed--and it would be easy to assume that the Dane had been lured by a surfeit of romantic enthusiasm in later years to exaggerate the extent of his lyrical debt to the Scot were it not for the numerous statements in unpublished notes and

diaries dating from his earliest days as a poet.¹⁶ Burns was from the beginning of Aakjær's career as a writer his greatest idol and he planned to write a biography of the Scot as he had done of Blicher.

Of the versions which were published, the most ambitious is that of "The Jolly Beggars," done into 337 lines of Danish. Like its original, it is experimental, though Aakjær's use of *tatere* (gypsies)--in Denmark also a much-despised race of folk who were ready to take on jobs which nobody else would touch, such as the flaying of horses--is not a particularly happy equivalent of Burns's beggars in this context. Otherwise, Aakjær's version comes through as a spirited and quite varied presentation of a picturesque scene of which he had no direct experience--though some of its power must have touched his visual imagination by way of illustrations made to accompany the poem. As an interpreter of the old Scots comic tradition inherited by Burns through Ramsay and Fergusson from the anonymous poets of "Christ's Kirk on the Green" and "Peblis, to the Play" Aakjær stands up remarkably well, mainly because of his facility in finding onomatopoeic correspondences which make part of *De Lystige Tiggere* sound to the Scots-speaker not unlike the recited verses of "Christ's Kirk" and "Peblis." However, Aakjær's model here was almost certainly to be found nearer home, possibly in the verse of the late 18th-century Norwegian writer, Johan Wessel, and not in the mock archer-contest of mediæval Scots, which Aakjær did not know.

Men Drengen Amor slap en Pil
 en "Dame" mærked Svien
 Og søgte hos vor Spil'mand Hvil
 i Læ af Hønsestien
 Men hendes Husbond dansed Ril
 og tørned rundt som Bien
 naar den er vred,--dog snart i Smil
 han skifted Melodien
 og lo den Nat

for

But hurchin Cupid shot a shaft,
 That play'd a dame a shavie--
 The fiddler rak'd her, fore and aft,
 Behint the Chicken cavie;
 Her lord, a wight o Homer's craft,
 Tho' limpan wi'the Spavie,
 He hirpl'd up an' lap like daft,
 An' shor'd them Dainty Davie
 O' boot that night

is standard Danish and catches the rollicking spirit, if not the exact literal meaning, of the stanza though "a wight o' Homer's craft" which is a reference to the tradition that Homer was a ballad-singer, is lost in the Danish which simply refers to "her husband" dancing a reel.

Aakjær's versions vary a great deal in technique and result. Some are word-for-word translations into standard Danish ("*Findlay*," "*Nancy*"); others emerge as stirring renderings of both the language and the character of their originals *Trods alt det* (A Man's a Man for A' That); *Født til Graad* is an accurate version of "Man Was Made To Mourn," while *Skjøn Nelly* (On a Bank of Flowers, in a Summer Day) is a severely literal exercise into standard Danish and is as unremarkable as the 18th-century English stereotype from which Burns derived it. *I det Fjerne* conveys only the beginning and concluding spirit of Burns's *Over the Seas and Far Away* and *Var Skylden min?* is a compressed version of *Had I the wyte?* But *Hellig Wolles Bøn* seizes the irony of *Holy Willie's Prayer* and follows its development in detail. Aakjær especially hated the gloom-ridden pietistic movement within the Danish State Church known as the "Inner Mission." These were religious recluses who meditated on sin (either their own or their neighbour's). Aakjær attacked them in pamphlets and speeches about 1898, labelling them anti-social and enemies of progressive Danes, who ought to be permitted to see their past and present as it really was and thereby free themselves from enslaving traditions.¹⁷ *Hellig Wolles Bøn*, translated in that same year, speaks as if for Burns and, by the same token, for Aakjær himself, against the hypocrisy of the "unco guid" both in Scotland and in Denmark.

Comin Thro' the Rye, translated as *Jenny i Rugen*, is an approximation, but one which holds as much as Aakjær can inject into it of the precise quality of the original, for example, the "boy" from the "girl" body:

Hvis nu Gutten mødte Glutten
 gaaende i Rug
 skulde Glutten nægte Gutten
 et par Kys i Smug?

for

Gin a body meet a body
 Comin thro the Rye,
 Gin a body kiss a body
 Need a body cry?

and though in the first stanza he does not try to translate "petticoatie" directly, his use of "futten" (a nursery rather

than a dialect diminutive of standard Danish *fod* and still used in addressing children) catches the Scots tendency to use sentimental reductions (i.e., footie).

The well-known theme of May and January handled by Burns in "What can a young lassie do wi an auld man?" provides Aakjær with a suitable model for his own preference for the graphic-- it is brisk and fully in the tradition of ironic verses composed on this subject:

Han klager, han klynker
han Ansigt har Rynker,
han hoster, han humper som Padde i Sand,
og Blodet er blaaset,
i Sengen forfrosset,
o, styg er en Nat hos en kold gammel Mand

He's always compleenin
Frae mornin to eenin
He hoasts and he hirples
The weary day lang
He's doylt and he's dozin;
His blude it is frozen--
O dreary's the night
Wi' a crazy auld man

Wolles Viv and *En Skrædder i Sengen* (*Willy Wastle dwelt on Tweed* and *The Tailor Fell Through the Bed*) are both fairly literal versions of two other comic songs of which the second is only partly of Burns's composition. In the first, Aakjær uses a dialect form and a word for a coin of small value:

jeg gav sgi ej en Søsling for hind¹⁸

to convey

I wad na gie a button for her

and plunges into a very realistic account of the heroine's physical appearance, only a little less pungent than that of his model.

She dights her grunzie wi a hushion

becomes

paa Muffedissen tørrer Næsen

for the article referred to (a woolly wristlet or mitten) was

as familiar to Aakjær as it had once been to Burns himself. "Tørrer"--wipes--is standard Danish and has nothing like the force of "dights." Aakjær is much more strictly controlled by his standard than Burns was by English, and it has to be remembered that whereas Burns had the examples of Ramsay and more especially Fergusson behind him, Aakjær had no precedent for employing his own dialect to render Burns. He certainly had no ancient model like Dunbar to inspire him to maintain a tradition--only a rather vague comprehension of what the folk-heritage meant or ought to mean to a national poet in Denmark.

Der boed en Bonde is described by Aakjær as a "free translation" of "Kellyburn Braes" but though it cuts one stanza from the original it is not any more liberated than several others which he does not distinguish in this way. *Burns om sig selv* (There was a lad was born in Kyle) is, on the other hand, very close and literal, preserving an equal number of lines and the same metre as its original. The MS. of this translation shows a number of corrections which allow some indication of Aakjær's craft (cf. illustration). One is always conscious that, in translating a song, he tries to retain the musical pattern so that it may be sung in Danish to the same tune. Burns made words fit an old tune; Aakjær makes his Danish fit Burns's Scots rhythms.

Of all the songs ascribed to him, Aakjær's "free" rendering of Burns's "Auld Lang Syne" is (understandably) the most regularly sung in Denmark today, not only at Hogmanay celebrations but at the frequent informal gatherings at which the older generations of Danes sing in unison, drawing on a repertoire of *folkelige sange* (folk-songs) by various Scandinavian writers--Bjørnson, Drachmann, Jensen, Oehlenschläger,¹⁹ Ottosen, and Aakjær himself. In fact, it is as a composer of *folkelige sange* that he is best-known in Denmark now and his present neglect by scholars can be to some extent explained by the fact that in the past Aakjær was made to seem too *folkelig*. *Folkelighed*, or "folkishness" is not a quality highly esteemed even by less conservative Danish scholars and students of Scottish poetry may best understand his current reputation in terms of the "Kailyaird" inheritance from Burns, a judgement which is full of bias.

"Auld Lang Syne" was re-titled as "For Læng, Læng Sind" or more familiarly in Jutland with the name "Skuld gammel venskab rejn forgo" in January, 1922. In the *Collected Poems* it is described as "free after Robert Burns" but in fact Aakjær stays as close as he can to the 1788 text from *The Scots Musical Museum*. Unlike his earlier versions which are sparing in their use of *jysk*, "For Læng, Læng Sind" makes an extensive use of *jysk* vocabulary and phonetic spelling. This "Jutlandisation" is maintained throughout the song's five verses. The

opening stanza, together with the repeated refrain, shows no fewer than twelve variants from the standard:²⁰

Skuld gammel Venskab rejn forgo
og stryges fræ wor Mind?
Skuld gammel Venskab rejn forgo
med dem Daw saa læng, læng sind?

De skjønne Ungdomsdaw, aaja,
de Daw saa swær aa find!
Vi'el løwt wor Kop saa glaadle op
for dem Daw saa læng, læng sind!

The result is successful in the light of its avowed intention, though an idiom such as "a richt guid-willie waught" disappears completely nor is the full force of "we two hae paidl'd in the burn" conveyed by "Vi wojed sammel i æ bæk." But at the close of the evening the final rousing verse sounds much the same in *jysk* as it does in *skotsk*:

Der er mi Haand, do gamle Swend!
Ræk ower og gi mæ dind.
Hwor er æ skjøn aa find en Ven
en haaj mist for læng læng sind!

Notwithstanding its defects no other translated version of "Auld Lang Syne" carries along the native sentimental conviviality with such power and the Danish song does not give the impression that it is struggling to fit into the ready-made melody. This comfortable absorption stands as the hallmark of Aakjær's technique when he made Danish lyric out of Scots originals. This was the last Burns-Aakjær poem to be published during the latter's lifetime, making a total of 21 in print, as follows:

	<u>Composed</u>	<u>First Published</u> <u>Samlede Digte</u> (Collected Poems, [Copenhagen, 1919])
1. I det Fjærne (Over the Seas and Far Away)	1897	<i>Collected Poems</i>
2. Var Skylden min? (Had I the wyte?)	30 July, 1898	<i>Collected Poems</i>
3. Findlay (Wha is that at my bower door?)	Summer, 1898	<i>Verdensspejlet</i> , 16 October, 1904

	<u>Composed</u>	<u>First Published</u> <u><i>Samlede Digte</i></u> <u>(Collected Poems,</u> <u>[Copenhagen, 1919])</u>
4. Nancy (My Spouse Nancy)	Summer, 1898	<i>Collected Poems</i>
5. Trods alt det (A Man's a Man for A That)		<i>Vestjyllands Social Demokrat,</i> 23 March, 1901
6. Født til Graad (Man Was Made to Mourn)	1898	<i>Vestjyllands Social Demokrat,</i> 2 February, 1900
7. Hellig Wolles Bøn (Holy Willie's Prayer)	1898	<i>Det Ny Århundrede,</i> August 1908, p.799
8. Jenny i Rugen (Comin Thro the Rye)	1898	<i>Verdensspejlet,</i> 7 December, 1902
9. Skjøn Nellie (On a bank of flowers, in a summer day.)	1898	<i>Collected Poems</i>
10. Hvad kan en ung Kvinde (What can a young Lassie doe wi an auld Man?)	1898	<i>Collected Poems</i>
11. Duncan Gray (Duncan Gray)	1898	<i>Collected Poems</i>
12. Jock Rab (Eppie M ⁿ Nab)	1898	<i>Collected Poems</i>
13. Tibbi Dunbar (Tibby Dunbar)	1898	<i>Collected Poems</i>
14. John Anderson (John Anderson)	1898	<i>Vestjyllands Social Demokrat,</i> Christmas Number, 22 December, 1907 under the title "De Gamle"
15. O, luk mig ind. (O Lassie, are ye sleeping yet?)	1898	<i>Collected Poems</i>

	<u>Composed</u>	<u>First Published</u> <u>Samlede Digte</u> (Collected Poems, [Copenhagen, 1919])
16. Wolles viv (Willie Wastle dwelt on Tweed)	1898	<i>Collected Poems</i>
17. En Skrædder i Sengen (The Tailor Fell Through the Bed)	1898	<i>Aftenbladets lystige Historier</i> (Axel Wessel), 1903, p.39.
18. De lystige Tiggere (The Jolly Beggars)	1898	<i>Collected Poems</i>
19. Der boed en Bonde (Kellyburn Braes)	1902	<i>Morskabsbogen</i> (Copenhagen, 1902), p. 7 under the title "Rappenskralden" (virago).
20. Burns om sig selv (There was a lad was born in Kyle)	1898	<i>Collected Poems</i>
21. Skuld gammel Venskab rejn forjo (Auld Lang Syne)	January, 1922 ²¹	<i>Skive Folkeblad</i> , 31 January, 1922

Of these most are songs and Aakjær's penchant for the lyrical is evident in his choice of subject--he was less attracted to the harshly satirical Burns of "Holy Willie's Prayer" than by the personal, musing Burns, recalling bygone loves, yet his range within the 21 is wide--sentimental lyric, humorous lyric, comic characterisation, duet, revolutionary song, cantata--Aakjær attempted to catch a variety of Burns's many moods, not always with outstanding success. His "Jolly Beggars," however, is a remarkable achievement in its way and if Aakjær had to be remembered by one "translation" alone, this would be the choice; it invites a close line-by-line comparison on linguistic and literary grounds as an example of the art of an ambitious translator at the peak of his enthusiasm.

In the summer of 1913 Aakjær made a second journey to Scotland, this time accompanied by his eldest son. When he returned to Jutland in November he carried a number of souvenirs

in the form of popular editions of Burns's poems, albums of photographs of Selkirk and Ayr and numerous other relics of his holiday. One of these was a so-called "translation" of "Tam O'Shanter" into *English* by a certain Isabella K. Gough. On the flyleaf of his copy, Aakjær wrote,

Don't read the translation--it is only an infamous
vandalising made by an English blue-stocking who has
not shrunk from destroying Burns's rhythms

and it may have been about this time that he began his own version of "Tam O'Shanter," an exercise which friends and admirers had often encouraged him to attempt. He completed only the first 36 lines (35 lines in the original) and these were never published, nor indeed was their existence known until 1977.²²

Aakjær's "Tam" is turned into standard Danish with only one obvious "Jutlandisation"²³ and its accuracy may best be judged by the non-reader of Danish by laying a literal translation back into English alongside Burns's original Scots. It will be noted that Aakjær feels for the closest Danish equivalent which will at the same time preserve the various galloping rhythms which Burns maintains relentlessly throughout the poem, shifting from faster- to slower-paced and back again as the narrator's mood alters in sympathy with the rapid succession of events which force the mock-hero towards his inevitable doom. Aakjær has obviously grasped the ludicrous quality in the poem--the weird attraction and repulsion of contrasts with which "Tam," together with much Scots narrative, abounds.

Literally, Aakjær's draft of "Tam" runs as follows:

When the horse-coper with cracks of the whip
Has said at last his market-place farewell
And trading is over
And all footsteps have left the town
And peasants who hiccup out of pleasure
Knock back the final drink
While we ourselves at mug and barrel
Drink ourselves happily full and glad
We think only with a smile
On those long Scots miles
With marshes and swamps ringed around with reeds
Which separates us from our home
Where the wife sits sour and surly
And stormy weather builds up
And turns over the pages of her prayer-book
And keeps her spleen on the boil

This might Tam Shanter indeed understand
 As he one night with brows sweating from drink
 Rode home from Ayr, that splendid city
 Which far excels in reputation
 Every other town in these realms.

O Tam, why did you not take advice
 From your own wise wife
 Who saw in you a proper fillpot
 Who never missed a single tavern
 An over-soaked fellow-boozer
 Who would tackle the bender with all zeal
 Drunk and sloshed and never sober
 Right from November till October
 Even when you were just going to the mill
 You drank fit to burst (lit: as if you would crack)
 On each horse that needed a shoe
 You tossed off a pot or two
 Even on a Sunday--what a disgrace!
 You swapped drinks with Jean Kirkton
 And kept up your sinful boozing
 Till Monday's sun peeped into your mug
 And her song ended thus
 They would be sure to find you drowned in the Doon
 sometime
 Deep among the reeds and rushes
 If a hungry werewolf had not already swallowed you up
 From head to foot
 Behind Alloway's old church-gable

O I could dissolve in tears
 At the thought of that wifely advice
 That wise and soft warning whistle
 For which nobody cares a doit.

Why did Aakjær not proceed further? He was certainly not afraid of a "long poem" of Burns's and finished "The Jolly Beggars," so that it was not a failure of endurance which set in, nor was he intimidated by a *tour de force* as such. Perhaps he rapidly came to perceive that "Tam O'Shanter" does not submit to translation and that not even Danish can carry more than a fraction of its rhythmic and "architectonic" subtleties. Aakjær's text loses a great deal owing to the fact that the complex cultural weight of the poem cannot be effectively transmuted out of Scots. Aakjær and Burns are here working in different literary traditions and the Danish lyricist clearly

found the frenzy conveyed by the mediæval comic pattern--the "spirit of Dunbar"--elusive even in the early part of the poem; in fact it is obvious that he did not realize exactly what it was that he ought to be seeking. The best advice that can be given to a would-be translator of "Tam" is not to meddle with the linguistically intractable; Aakjær seems to have understood the insurmountable difficulties in this case or, at the very least, he should be accorded the benefit of the doubt since he abandoned the task. A less-sensitive practitioner might have carried on to produce at best a travesty of the original.

Only one clear instance of Aakjær's deliberate use of a Jutlandic form occurs in his draft, though several words are archaic, provincial or appear to be coinages of the poet's own. In general his choices are conservative but it must be noted that this was no more than a draft--though probably not a first draft, judging from the scarcity of deletions and emendations in the text.²⁴ The Dane renders the English words and phrases skilfully but the emotional force of the Scots--"ae spark o Nature's fire"--is inaccessible to him.

Though the most successful Danish translator of Burns, Aakjær was not the first, nor even the second.²⁵ The pioneer was Emil Aarestrup (1800-56), a prominent love poet, by profession physician with a practice in Lolland (the southern part of Denmark). His *Efterladte Digte* (Copenhagen, 1863) contains versions of "O Thou Pale Orb" and "O my luve is like a red, red rose." His *Samlede Digte* (Copenhagen, 1877) adds "To Mary in Heaven." According to notes in his *Samlede Digte* (V, p. 1, Copenhagen, 1925) the MSS. of these translations are dated 1837 and 14th August, 1835, respectively. "To Mary in Heaven," known also under the title "Thou lingering star" with which the poem begins, is a song from *The Scots Musical Museum* (1790) and affords Aarestrup an opportunity to display his outstanding characteristic as a poet, namely, to convey the effects on the senses of sharp physical memories. This is a romantic quality which he shares with Burns. The lines

Ayr gurgling kiss'd his pebbled shore;
 O'erhung with wild woods, thickening green;
 The fragrant birch, and hawthorn hoar,
 Twin'd amorous round the raptur'd scene;

become

Af Grønsvær blød, behængt med Krat,
 Steg Kysten i den varme Luft
 En Birkelund, den vilde Tjørn
 Omsnoete Stedet med sin Duft

which conveys the atmosphere, but not the same details, nor the Scottish locality. It is the emotional force which is carried but not specifically Burns's personal feelings which relate to a particular memory of a dead love on the Banks of Ayr.

The second translator was the shadowy C. Preetzmann, who wrote many poems under the pseudonym "Caralis" and contributed 21 versions from Burns to his *Hundrede Digte ved Caralis efter det Engelske* (Copenhagen, 1877). To these must be added four others published in the weekly journals *Nær og Fjern* (1878) and *Ude og Hjemme* (1880). His (or her) versions are freer than Aarestrup's, and more pedestrian. *John Anderson* by Caralis, runs:

John Anderson, Du Kjaere!
 Da vi blev først bekjendt
 Din Lok var sort som Ravnen,
 Din Kind af Solen brændt
 Nu er din Pande bar, John!
 Om Issen Sneen staaer,
 Men Himlen være, gamle John!
 Med dine hvide Haar!

and Aakjær's rendering

John Anderson, min Fryd, John
 da først vi to blev kendt
 dit Haar var mørkt som Ravnen
 din Pande brun og brændt;
 nu er din Isse bar, John,
 og bleget Løkkens Pryd.
 Velsign dog Gud din Tinding graa,
 John Anderson, min Fryd

which is much more sensitive. He said that his re-creation represented

a soft whisper about two old folks' life-long love and fidelity that was only permitted to express itself in a handpress before Death separates them.²⁶

Again, he has succeeded in conveying the intensely personal emotion of a relationship which he, like Burns, had actually observed and thought about. Caralis has simply dealt with the song as a problem in transliteration of meaning, disregarding its lyrical qualities or at least assuming that the music emerges incidentally.

Uffe Birkedal, whose translations of Burns appeared in 1908,²⁷ also tried his hand at "John Anderson":

John Anderson, min Jo, John,
 da først vi saa hinanden
 da var dit haar helt ravneseort
 og ganske glat var panden.
 Nu er din isse skaldet, John
 dit haar som sne, min tro.
 Gud signe dine rynker dog,
 John Anderson, min Jo!

and, unfortunately, at *Tam O'Shanter*. Aakjær despised Birkedal's efforts to convey the spirit of Burns and said that he was

a type who stamps and tramples with his dirty boots in a heap of corn and comes back with a handful of chaff--he presents us with the stalk. This is Burns's poetry put through a mincing-machine. It is not enough that one should grapple with poetry by being a fine and upright man--it is also necessary to have some talent.²⁸

Harsh words, but not far from the truth. Aakjær's concern with Burns was personal from the start. He said of Burns's songs that they were about young love-longings, transient youthful joys, the struggle for the right of young people to love and embrace without persecution, full of yearning and sunshine but at the same time familiar with grief and disappointment. At the time when these song-translations were written, Aakjær's own marriage to Marie Bregendahl was collapsing and he felt strong emotional tensions in his domestic life.

Aakjær did not confine himself to Burns as a source for translation. His *Collected Poems* include examples taken from a number of English-writing poets, e.g., G. K. Chesterton, Goldsmith, Hood, Leigh Hunt, Kipling, Landor, Morris, Shelley, Stevenson and James Thomson, as well as Jean-Pierre de Béranger (whose "Les Gueux" was adversely compared by Taine with "The Jolly Beggars"), Goethe and Swedish poets including Gustav Frøding, Sweden's earliest translator of Burns. All are competent, ranging from the exercise to the characterization, but in general they lack the "grip" which Aakjær displays so frequently when he deals with Burns. For him, Burns's importance lay in his connection with the Scots peasantry, much as Aakjær himself tried to do, though, working in a minority language, spoken by only a few million people in what was then

considered a remote part of Northern Europe, he suffered from a far greater disadvantage than Burns himself had to overcome.

Aakjær's last recorded reference to Burns occurred in the course of a speech given in the Town Hall of Copenhagen on 10th September, 1926--"Min Hædersdag" (My Day of Honour).²⁹ It reveals a consistency of interest which had endured for nearly forty years and touches upon the special linguistic and sociological relationship which he thought linked Jute and Scot, the "pith" in the two vocabularies and the exactitude with which one could be expressed in the other. This long-standing harmony was first detectable in the works of Thomas Kingo (1634-1763), whose father was a Scots-born weaver and who was renowned as a composer of hymns in the tradition of Knox.

Aakjær's academic bent was always toward historical rather than philological studies. His correspondence with Otto Jespersen and particularly with George Brandes³⁰ is extensive but his championing of the romantic theory of "pure" origins and relations was evidently not in the least subverted by discussions with a professional philologist like Jespersen, who dismissed them. Certainly he never revealed any change of mind in any of his lectures on Scottish literature and society, which he always insisted was paralleled by conditions in his own beloved Jutland. His views on Burns and Scotland are dated, coloured as they were by the romantic tradition of Carlyle and the sentiment attached to Burns studies by authorities whose reputations were made when Aakjær was a young man.

These versions of Burns have encouraged Danes to note special affinities between Scots and standard Danish--particularly "old" or pre-1814 Danish vocabulary, which fascinated Aakjær and compelled him to pursue his search for origins, albeit in an amateurish way. Of all the translations of Burns, into both European and non-European languages, those of Jeppe Aakjær's into Danish with a Jutlandic thread approach their originals most closely in spirit and in word.

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NOTES

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Unless otherwise stated in footnotes, translations from primary and secondary sources are the author's and any consequent errors remain his responsibility.

² He changed his name by deed poll in 1906 but all his published works bear the name "Åkjær" (or "Aakjær" as it was spelled before 1948).

³ A dialect term (*jen* corresponds to Scots *ane*).

⁴ From an address given in Ålborg on 21st February, 1913, and published in *Artikler og Taler, 1887-1918* (Copenhagen, 1921), 263-80. The extract is taken from a translation by Tonny Daa in *Burns Chronicle*, XXIV, (January, 1915), 5-25.

⁵ See Kenneth Olwig, "Place, Society and the Individual in the Authorship of St. Blicher," in *Omkring Blicher*, (Copenhagen, 1974), 69-114. Aakjær's enthusiasm for *jysk* was not that of the *målstræver* or fanatic about words, as was true of the early practitioners of Norsk (later called Nynorsk). He simply felt that it was as deserving of attention by philologists as any other little-known language and his interest in it had no political or social motives. In this particular Aakjær differed from C. M. Grieve, Lewis Spence, and the "Lalans" revivalists of the 1920's.

⁶ The last "local fiddler," to stimulate Aakjær's creative powers in connection with Burns was Søren Poulsen (1898-) who still plays for folk-dances. At his suggestion, Aakjær translated "Auld Lang Syne" in 1922. On Whitsunday of that year, he sent Poulsen a note saying: "I have seen how fond you are of song, and song is intensely cultivated here" (holograph MS.). (Holograph MS. kindly provided by Mr. Søren Poulsen.)

⁷ *Efterladte Erindringer*, ed. Georg Saxild, (Copenhagen, 1934), 31. Later he refers to starting a version of "The Cotter's Saturday Night" and to reading the original to his friend, the novelist Johan Skjoldborg, who used the *motif* down to the smallest detail in the introductory chapter of his novel *Sara* (1906).

⁸ Ibid., 98-9 (12 August 1927).

⁹ Ålborg address, cf., n. 4 *supra*. It is useful to compare this statement with H. C. Andersen's remarks on Scotland in *Mit Livs Eventyr* (The Fairy Tale of My Life) in which he recorded his own visit in 1855.

¹⁰ O, Skotlands Lorder viden kjendt,
lad Skammen skrive paa jer Ryg:
En Aand kom til jer himmelsendt,
Nationen lod den tærskke Byg!
("Paa Lochlea")

O Scotland' Lords, known
world-wide,
Let the shame be written
on your back:
A genius came to you,
Heaven-sent,
The Nation let him thresh
the Barley!

¹¹ Som fattig Tolder lod dit folk dig dø,
dets største Hjerter, sonderbrudt og ene;
længs slog dog Folkekulden om til Tø;
nu faar du Statuer paa høje Stene.
("Robert Burns")

As a poor customs man
your people let you die,
Its greatest heart broken
and alone
After a long time your
people's coldness thawed
And statues were now made
from tall stones.

¹² "I Burns Fødehjem" (Birthplace), stanza 2.

¹³ cf., Sven Møller Kristensen, *Den store Generation*, (Copenhagen, 1974) p. 141.

¹⁴ The term *ballad* or *ballade* in Nordist scholarly terminology now refers to a specifically mediæval form having two- or four-line stanzas and a refrain, but in the 19th century, following Svend Grundtvig's influence, the word *folkevise* was employed to describe this type of anonymous narrative lyric.

(e.g., Grundtvig's "ancient ['gamle'] folkeviser") and this usage is still encountered (cf. Iørn Piø, "On reading orally-performed ballads: the mediæval ballads of Denmark" in *Oral Tradition: Literary Tradition, a Symposium*, [Odense, 1977], 69).

¹⁵ "jeg finder den Jydske Tone takket være Robert Burns" (unpub. MS. dated "10/2/1929") in Jeppe Aakjær's Arkiv, Royal Library, Copenhagen, (*Ny. kgl Saml.*, 40, III, 8). This is the third of six autobiographical notes preceded in importance by a statement concerning the improvement of his finances and another saying that he "escaped from his marriage."

¹⁶ In the 1890's he estimated Burns as being of first importance in his own poetic development and his published *Recollections* explain how much he considered himself to be in debt to the Scots song-tradition, together with Burns's example of the use of plain style and singable form in the manner of the folk-poet (cf., Sven Møller Kristensen, *op.cit.*, pp. 141-2; 145).

¹⁷ See Waldemar Westergaard, "Jeppe Aakjær" (*American-Scandinavian Review*, November, 1934), pp. 665-9, (in English).

¹⁸ In Jutlandic, *sgi*, a corruption of standard *sgu* or *så gu*: *hind* for standard *hende*.

¹⁹ Properly speaking Oehlenschläger, who belongs to the early 19th century, is not a "folkish" writer, though poems of his, set to music by Carl Nielsen, are occasionally rendered at such gatherings, which take their origin from Grundtvig and the "folk high-school" movement.

²⁰ *gammel, skuld, rejn, forgo, fræ, wor, Mind, Daw, læng, sind, lowt, glædle* are in standard *gammelt, skulde, helt, forgaa, fra, vores, Minde, Dage, læng, siden, løfte, glad*.

²¹ Aakjær's versions of Burns were first gathered together in *Samlede Digte* (Collected Poems), (Copenhagen, 1919). Text and references here are to the 3rd edition (3 vols., Copenhagen, 1934). The "Auld Lang Syne" translation was specially reprinted to mark the Danish poet's centenary (Ringkøbing, 1966). It had appeared in his last collection *Under Aftenstjærnen* (1927) with the note "Skotsk Folkemelodi. Moderato. Piano," and the well-known tune, and was again printed as a separate sheet, accompanied by drawings, by P. Thomson (Holstebro, 1928).

²² Discovered in that year among miscellaneous papers in Aakjær's study at "Jenle."

²³ *Lig fra* November til Oktober (Right from November till October). *Lig*--standard Danish *lige*. Jutland dialect habitually drops final *e*.

²⁴ In addition, the poet's holograph was written on yellow copy paper which suggests a second or subsequent draft. Aakjær was very frugal with paper and for the roughest drafts used pieces of old letters. The sheets of yellow paper, purchased from Chr. Petersen Papirhandel, Nikolajplads, Copenhagen, were each cut into six sections.

²⁵ For information on and transcriptions of earlier translations of Burns into Danish the author is greatly indebted to Miss Kirsten Marie Espersen of Viby in Jutland. The mysterious "Caralis" could be Caspara Preetzmann (1792-1876), a minor woman painter. If so, the translation was published posthumously.

²⁶ Ålborg address (cf. n. 4 *supra*) in *Artikler og Taler 1887-1918*, p. 279.

²⁷ cf., *Af Robert Burns Digte ved Uffe Birkedal*, (Copenhagen, 1908). Birkedal (1852-1931) also translated Chaucer and wrote a book on William Morris. He is also known as a promoter of the Folk High School Movement.

²⁸ MS. note in Aakjær's own copy of *Birkedal*, in his library at "Jenle." MS. note is reproduced with the permission of Fru Solvejg Bjerre.

²⁹ In *Fra Sallingland til Øresund: Studier fra Hjemstavn*, (Copenhagen, 1932) pp. 128-33. First printed 1927.

³⁰ *Jeppe Aakjær's Arkiv*, (Royal Library, Copenhagen).