

Den levende fonograf: Nordmændenes Professor Higgins

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English was taught at the University of Oslo from the early 1820s, but did not become an academic discipline proper until fifty years later, when Johan Storm was appointed Professor of English and Romance Languages. Johan Storm was a man of quite extraordinary abilities. He produced scholarly work of high standard in various disciplines: phonetics, Norwegian dialectology, English language, French syntax – and also ‘applied linguistics’, if I may be allowed to use the term somewhat anachronistically. Storm came to be regarded as one of the leading authorities on English language in Europe in the second half of the 19th century, and scholars from several countries turned to him for advice and to ‘pick his brains’. But not only was Storm a fine scholar, he was also a superb linguist – in the sense ‘skilled in foreign languages’. His command of English was virtually flawless.

A biography of Johan Storm is long overdue, but until now none has been written. This year, however, will probably see the publication of two biographies of Johan Storm, neither of which written by a Norwegian. One of these has already been published, viz. Arne Juul’s *Den levende fonograf: Nordmændenes Professor Higgins*. Arne Juul is a Danish scholar, who has published a number of books and articles on Modern English language, the teaching of foreign languages, and in recent years also on the history of English Studies. The book under review here is an expanded version of an article published in *Uddannelseshistorie* 1999. 33. årbog fra Selskabet for Dansk Skolehistorie (Odense) in 1999. In the

course of 14 short chapters Juul gives a fascinating picture of Johan Storm – not a full-length picture, rather a portrait, inasmuch as Juul limits himself to certain aspects of Storm's life and career. (One reason for that is Juul's awareness that a full-scale biography of Storm is expected in the autumn of 2002.) For one thing Juul is mainly concerned with Storm's work on English and pays less attention to Storm's achievements in other fields. Secondly, Juul has (naturally enough) chosen to concentrate large parts of his discussion on Storm's relations with Danish scholars, notably Vilhelm Thomsen, with whom Storm developed a warm friendship, and Otto Jespersen, whose relations with Storm were somewhat strained at times, but who nevertheless received important impulses from Storm, not least at the crucial moment in Jespersen's life when he gave up his law studies and turned to philology. Indeed there is reason to believe that if it had not been for Storm's influence Jespersen would have steered clear of English and concentrated on French. Three of the chapters in the book are specifically devoted to the relations between Storm and his Danish colleagues.

The longest chapter in the book is concerned with Storm's *opus magnum* in English, his *Englische Philologie*, which receives a thorough discussion. Interesting light is shed not only on the results of Storm's research but also on his methods. And his pioneering work on the spoken English of the day, including 'the vulgar language' is given due notice. Other topics dealt with by Juul are Storm's thoughts about university teaching, his ideas about how to improve the teaching of foreign languages in the schools, and in that connection his relations with the so-called 'Reform Movement'. It is quite clear that Storm's influence on the Reform Movement has been underestimated. Chapter 9 deals with Storm's impressive practical command of English and other foreign languages, about which one of Storm's contemporaries, the French linguist Paul Passy, has this to say:

Professor J. Storm, of Christiania, is probably the greatest practical linguist, as also the greatest phonetician, in the world. He speaks English *quite* like a native, Italian, French and German very nearly as well ...

And Henry Sweet is of the same opinion:

His pronunciation of English and command of its idiom is so perfect that an ordinary observer might converse with him for hours without suspecting him to be a foreigner.

Chapter 10 touches on Storm's abilities as a lecturer (this seems to have been a less strong point with him) and brief mention is made of two of Storm's pupils, viz. August Western and Hans Edvard Torkildsen, while chapter 11 discusses Storm's familiarity with and use – or rather non-use – of the phonograph. It is somewhat surprising that both Storm and Jespersen, who were both familiar with the existence of the phonograph and obviously realised its great potentialities, made so little use of it in their work.

Juul's book bears eloquent witness to the author's great scholarly abilities. His flair for digging out relevant source material is little short of amazing. The book contains a Bibliography which covers 16 ½ pages out of a total of 170. There is also an Index of names. Finally it should be mentioned that the book is lavishly and beautifully illustrated, which makes it a treat to look at in addition to being a pleasure to read.

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