

PENSUMSAMMENDRAG

«Pensumdugnad» på HSN, april 2018

MFS Vår 2018, Ann-Mari Bugge
«Pensumdugnad» på Høgskolen i Sørøst-Norge,

Teksten: Leon Edel: «The Figure Under the Carpet»

Artikkelen er obligatorisk fellespensum og er å finne i kompendiet. Teksten er på 19 sider.

Bakgrunn

Teksten er skrevet i forbindelse med en utstilling av portretter i National Portrait Gallery i London, 1979. Senere utgitt i essaysamlingen *Telling Lives: The Biographer's Art*. Kopien i kompendiet er fra denne samlingen.

Litt om tittelen, og inspirasjonen til denne:

“The figure in the carpet” is a short story published in 1896 in London by American writer Henry James. The story is usually referred to as a novella and is told in first person. The narrator, whose name is never revealed, meets his favourite author and becomes obsessed with discovering the secret meaning or intention within all the author's works.

Det fortelleren setter ut for å forstå er forfatteren som er «like a complex figure in a persian carpet».

The novella first appeared in the periodical *cosmopolis* in January/February 1896. Hardcover published in June 1896 in a volume titled *Embarrassments*.

Om forfatteren

- One of the most prominent biographers and theorist of biography across the mid-twentieth century.
- Joseph Leon Edel (1907-1997) was a North American literary critic and biographer.
- The elder brother of philosopher Abraham Edel.
- The Encyclopedia Britannica calls Edel “the foremost 20th century authority on the life and works of Henry James.
- Received National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize.
- Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Grew up in Yorkton, Saskatchewan
- Wrote on James Joyce and the Bloomsbury group
- His lifework is summed up in his five-volume (!) biography of Henry James (1953-1972)
- Held a stream of lectures and essays from the 1950s to the 1980s

Hovedtese

Edel discussed the notion of biography in *Literary Biography* (1957), in particular his conviction that literary biography should enfold a subjective author's self-perspective into his output.

Edel stressed the importance of recognising biography as a form of literature, while pointing also to its important links with other disciplines. The research methods of the biographer were the same as those of the historian, he argued, and biographers needed to take the critical approach to their sources that all historians did. + anthropology + social sciences.

According to Edel there are four basic principles involved in the writing of good biography. Three of them centre on the approach and attitude of the biographer and they show very clearly Edel's interest in *psychoanalysis*.

- 1) His first principle concerns the need for the biographer to 'learn to understand man's way of dreaming, thinking and using his fancy'. > The manifestation of the unconscious
- 2) The tendency of a biographer to identify with or hero-worship his subject. Beware to fail to maintain a critical distance.
- 3) Keys to deeper truth by analysing public activity or literary works – in order to understand the "private mythology" (the hidden personal myth), the essences.
- 4) Form and structure.

Edel sammenligner portrettkunsten i galleriet med biografikunsten i skrift:

«Biography is the art of human portrayal in words, and it is a noble and adventurous art.»

Edel sier at den vanskeligste oppgaven en biograf har er:

«his search for what I call the figure under the carpet, the evidence in the reverse of the tapestry, the life-myth of a given mask.»

Edels metode:

“The method I am proposing for biography is related to the methods of Sherlock Holmes and also to those of Sigmund Freud.

The right doors will open if the right questions are asked: the mountains of trivia will melt away, and essences will emerge. It requires a certain kind of talent, a certain kind of inwardness to look at the reverse of a tapestry, to know when and where to seek the figure under the carpet.

Selvframstilling

Se eksemplet om Hemingway s. 26-27. Her viser han hvordan Hemingways selvframstilling har 'lurt' biografer, men det man burde gjøre er å se på 'the reverse of the tapestry' for å skrive 'the portrait within'.

Kunst

Edel lager sammenligninger som at biografen ikke kan finne opp fakta, skulptøren kan ikke finne opp leiren, maleren kan ikke finne opp malingstuben. Det er arrangementen, som er kunsten.

Essens

Edel mener det finnes en essens i et menneske, og at en biograf må avdekke denne: «See/find the figure under the carpet in the reverse of the tapestry». «There are painted portraits then that are mere facades; there are biographies that are mere compendiums. [...]. A compendium is like a family album: as series of pictures, selections from an archive. The biographer producing such a work often pretends that he is allowing the character to speak for himself or herself. This is an ingenuous way of avoiding biographical responsibility. That responsibility involves not only accumulation and offering facts: it entails the ability to interpret these facts in the light of all that the biographer has learned about his subject.

Storytelling

The biographer, after all, is as much of a storyteller as the novelist or historian; indeed, he is a specialized kind of historian.

Ordforklaring

The reverse of the Tapestry – Baksiden av billedveven (tråder, knuter og kryssinger på baksiden)

Kritikk

Senere postmodernistisk teori/holdninger foreslår at det ikke finnes noen «egentlig» sannhet, eller kjerne.