

Janteloven and Social Conformity in Thorbjørn Egner's Literature

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Abstract

Janteloven is a set of fictional laws detailed in Danish author Aksel Sandemose's 1933 book, "A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks," which satirizes the Scandinavian view towards individuality versus the collective. These laws, consisting of rules such as "thou shalt not believe thou art better than us," direct a negative attitude towards those who stand out from the cultural norm. This contradicts the ever-growing ethnic diversity in Norway today. Today, Janteloven is regarded as a sociological term describing the unified mindset in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway that champions societies where inhabitants are encouraged to set the community's needs over the individual's. This mindset is prevalent as an agent of socialization through Norwegian children's literature. A sample of eight children books by Norwegian author Thorbjørn Egner, published between 1940 and 1958, were analyzed, and examples of behaviors or speech exhibiting Janteloven behavior were recorded. These were scaled to the range of society affected: the individual, family, friends, or the community as a whole. This research, discovered that each book contains at least one example of a main character conforming to Janteloven behavior and social norms. The results of the research imply that Egner's work strongly promotes community harmony over individual social achievement, suggesting that Norwegian's children's literature enforces the Janteloven mindset. These findings help identify an area from which Norwegian cultural identity is shaped, and leads to the study of how this mindset creates attitudes that youth have toward their society, especially in an increasingly heterogeneous Norway.

Keywords: Janteloven, children's literature, Norway

1. Introduction:

For most of its history, Norway has been an ethnically, linguistically, culturally, and religiously homogenous country. It is also a country that prides itself on placing the community first not only as a belief, but also a value. Since its discovery of oil, and consequently its economic expansion, Norway's population has swelled with unprecedented numbers of immigrants. Norwegians pride themselves on their resistance to difference-based hate, as seen in their response to the 2011 Utøya shooting, their significant contributions in Middle East financial aid efforts, and passing legislation that promotes minority rights. Yet within this acceptance of difference and tolerance of diversity, there is an attitude that discourages Norwegians from thinking too high of themselves as individuals, simultaneously shunning those who stand out as 'different' in some way. These differences can be in the form of academic achievements or accomplishments, during observed events and rituals, or even unusual clothing. Regardless of the difference, this conformist attitude is traditionally known as *Janteloven*.

Originating from Denmark, 'Janteloven' is acknowledged in Sweden and Norway as well. Similar to the self-noted attitudes of "perpetually rushed" New York and "keep calm and carry on" in England, Janteloven formed as a self-deprecating attitude that moved beyond deprecation and has become a source of pride for most Scandinavians. In 1933, Danish author Aksel Sandemose wrote the book, *En Flykting Krysser Sitt Spor* (*A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks*), in which a criminal looks back on his childhood while returning to his hometown, Jante, Denmark. His

town is described as the quintessential Scandinavian country community, yet with a distinct set of laws that must be obeyed. The 10 laws are known by everyone, and are used as weapons against one's enemies in the town. The laws of Jante are:

1. Thou shalt not believe that thou art something.
 2. Thou shalt not believe that thou art as good as us.
 3. Thou shalt not believe that thou art more than us.
 4. Thou shalt not fancy thyself better than us.
 5. Thou shalt not believe thou know more than us.
 6. Thou shalt not believe thou art greater than us.
 7. Thou shalt not believe that thou art a worthwhile human being.
 8. Thou shalt not laugh at us.
 9. Thou shalt not believe that anyone is concerned with thee.
 10. Thou shalt not believe thou canst teach us anything.
- (Sandemose 77, adapted).

These laws are used to not only describe individualistic behaviour negatively, but to also *criminalize* it. Sandemose wrote the laws with the intent to satirize this mindset and bring it to the attention of the Scandinavian people. His writing style, described as "critical, yet forthright," had already shown its worth in bringing attention and calling for change in the beliefs and misconceptions of Danish settlements in Canada, and was practiced in capturing community attitudes in words (Woods 80). The response to his satire, *A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks*, was not what he had expected, though, as readers tended to accept—then *pride* themselves on—their ownership of this mindset, rather than deliberating over it.

Today, Janteloven is a sociological term that is used to describe an aversion to individual-minded behavior. It is used and proclaimed throughout Denmark, Sweden, and to a lesser degree in Norway. Though the term is used less in Norway, it does not mean it lacks presence in the country. Bennett, the creator of the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, pointed out in his cultural competency work that one of the most detrimental setbacks in developing as a global citizen is not recognizing or seeing the behaviours and attitudes holding one back. Just as this detriment is seen in the denial stage, the failure to acknowledge the existence of Janteloven behavior in Norway can hamper the ability of people to grow.

Janteloven, functioning as an attitude, is passed from one generation to the next by agents of socialization. These agents include family, peers, religion, school, government, ethnic background, work, and media. This paper focuses on the transfer of Janteloven through the context of media, looking specifically at children's literature. One of the most celebrated and most-read authors of Norwegian children's literature is Thorbjørn Egner, whose books have been noted as containing plotlines, characters, and laws that mimic the conformity presented by Sandemose's Janteloven.

Thorbjørn Egner was born in 1912, Oslo, Norway. Children were centric to his career—Egner became known nationally for his contributions for the radio program *Barnetime for De Minste* (*Children's Hour for the Smallest*), which was a station that played music and stories for children and families. Egner is also known and beloved for his work as an author of children's books. During his career, he wrote more than 20 books for youth, including text and song books. These books are considered a staple of Norwegian childhood due to their moral and practical lessons. Further, many of his books have been translated into Danish, German, English, Russian, Japanese, and other languages (Avant and Knutsen 450). Because most of Egner's books were written between 1949 and 1959, it is interesting how strongly the Janteloven mindset appears in Egner's stories almost 15 years after the concept was coined by Sandemose. The degree that Janteloven-like behaviour is present in Egner's children's literature likely influences the attitudes of the children to whom his books acted as agents of socialization.

This paper will first look at the scholarly literature regarding Janteloven and its effects on Norwegian society, focusing on the work of Avant and Knutsen in particular. After detailing the base research on this topic, it moves from the literature review into methodology, explaining the rationale behind the book selection of the study, instances, persistence, cultural ownership of Janteloven behavior, and measurements of the data collected. These factors form the basis for the case presentation, subsequent discussion of evidence, and conclusions. The conclusions address the implications of the results, the limitations of the study, and possible topics of study that can further enhance our understanding of children's literature as an agent for socialization, and Janteloven law in Norwegian literature.

2. Literature Review

There is not a great deal written about Janteloven, despite it being an integral part of Scandinavian culture. This may possibly be due to the 'subjective culture' nature of the topic. As Bennett describes, there are objective and subjective components to culture. The subjective aspects sometimes are not acknowledged by people due to their non-tangible nature. It is hard to measure a mental or sociological force that shapes examination of an issue. Avant and Knutson set the first authoritative definition of the Janteloven phenomenon by describing Janteloven as "[a term] used colloquially to negatively describe an attitude towards individuality and success common in...the Nordic countries. The term refers to a mentality that de-emphasizes individual effort and places all emphasis on the collective, while discouraging those who stand out as achievers" (450). These scholars are at the forefront of Janteloven research, as they have published some of the more sophisticated articles in the sociological impact of Janteloven, especially on diversity. They argue that it is appropriate to use an abstract concept to convey widely shared values, when the term aids communication. This is further validated due to the aptness that Janteloven describes as a widely shared set of attitudes in Norway.

As discussed previously, readers of Sandemose's *A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks* responded to his satirical portrayal of Scandinavian society by owning the collective-oriented attitude. Some scholars find this response particularly surprising due to some of the contemporary reviews of Sandemose's work. Avant and Knutson commented on the phenomenon, though the non-fiction work of Sorensen detailing the Danish settlements in Canada in the early 20th Century provide a close parallel. Sorensen describe the harsh conditions of farming on the Canadian prairies, and that only the hardest Danes—those who were most willing to receive little reward for their work—should take the trek. It was therefore surprising for Sandemose to see that his sociological satire was met with such an opposite reaction—acceptance of this mindset—than what was intended—realization and behaviour change.

Today, Norwegians are aware of both the positive and negative aspects of their championed Janteloven—the overwhelming need to conform to social norms. A search for "Janteloven" on the Dagbladet's (premiere national newspaper) website yields over 700 results for 2013-14 alone. The widespread use of this term communicates both a fear of individualism in the egalitarian Norwegian culture, as well as the Norwegian awareness of this fear (Avant and Knutson 450).

The defining nature of the Jante laws, as discussed by scholars, is that they relate to the community. Norwegian author Einar Eggen notes that just as in contemporary Scandinavia, the citizens of Jante are social beings above all else. Neither living alone nor autonomously, each man's feelings, thoughts, and actions must benefit the community (Avant and Knutson 451). As Norwegians have identified a potential crack in their egalitarian nation, the concept has become a value. In the Norwegian Language Council's dictionary, *Nyord i Norsk 1945-1975 (New Words in Norwegian 1945-1975)*, there was an entry for the word Jante, defined as "a person who is afraid of standing out in the crowd." This entry is followed by Janteloven, "a set of laws which express the small society's tyrannical attitude toward the individual who stands out in the crowd" (Avant and Knutson 455).

Sandemose, before listing the Jante laws, describes their impact to the reader with daunting words: "The Law of Jante! That is of greater importance than the Law of Moses, which is the subject of our official belief. It was more pardonable to break two or three of God's commandments than it was...to break the mightiest commandment in the Law of Jante" (44). Community is a prime value in many societies, but perhaps even more crucial in one that is sparsely populated, geographically separate from Europe, and relatively homogenous.

In *Espen Arnakke and His World* (Espen Arnakke og Hans Verden), Einar Eggen analyzes the laws of Jante:

"Some of these laws are apparently morally commendable in their demand that the individual should show humility in relation to their fellow human beings. But the laws are not really Jante's official moral message to the individual. Espen has discovered the laws in the attitudes and body language of the citizens of Jante" (Eggen, qtd. in Avant and Knutson 451).

The abstract concept of Janteloven is thus described as a helpful label for the shared Norwegian values. This concept is valuable precisely because of the observed adherence. These values create a sense of societal repression, resulting in a culture of 'hyper equality.' In other words, those who have been made "unfree have the urge to subdue others because they cannot endure anyone being different" (Beyer qtd. in 452).

The consensus of the literature focusing on Janteloven acknowledges the darker side of the 'ideal' egalitarian society. All societies have norms to which members are expected to conform. Janteloven, both in Sandemose's

literature and Scandinavian society, highlights this expectation to a high degree in Norwegian society. Even when differences among citizens are seen through innovative leadership, academic achievement, or creative expression, these accomplishments can be seen as a threat to the concept of an equal society. As Avant and Knutsen state, “the fear that somebody may be getting a bigger piece of the welfare cake threatens the social democratic Utopia” (452). This mirrors Sandemose’s description of the Jante society.

“But these were the very things which Jante disallowed, not by any means unconsciously, for this general attitude shone through every spoken word. You have grown up in other environments, and will never be able to grasp the inexorable effect of the Law of Jante. You will probably laugh at it and fail utterly to sense the deadly influence it had upon that working boy in Jante. By means of the Jante Law’s ten commandments, *Jante holds Jante down*” (emphasis added, Sandemose 78).

3. Methodology:

Eight childrens books by Thomas Egner were selected for this project. The books were selected according to dates published, and for the age group the book was intended. Egner’s songbooks and textbooks were not included in the sample. The Egner books collected were limited by availability, as many are now out of print. Additionally, all the books used in the sample were written in Norwegian, which reduced the potential for translation errors and inconsistencies between translations. Among contemporary Norwegian children's writers, Thorbjørn Egner's influence is the most far-reaching because he is responsible for writing and illustrating many of books for Norway's schools (Bozanic 1974). While not a Danish author like Sandemose, Egner made the concept of Janteloven most widespread in Norwegian society. Scholars are not only able to see the degree to which Janteloven is present in his work, but also the degree to which the Danish concept might have been adapted for Norwegian audiences. Since the formation of the Norwegian kingdom and its independence from Sweden, Norwegians have had few distractions from their efforts to create an egalitarian society based on national and cultural values due to the remoteness of the land and the economic isolation of the country (Avant and Knutsen 1994).

For each book in the study, the actions and motivations of the main characters are examined, as well as the reactions of the community around them. The degree to which their actions conform to Janteloven is represented on a fuzzy scale. The severity of non-Jante behavior is rated, with ranges from 0 to 5. Actions that go without repercussions are rated a score of 0. Actions that affect the behavior of the main character or cause difficulty for their ability to fit into a homogenous society rate a score of 1. Actions that result in repercussions among families or friends rate a score of 2 or 3, depending on the severity and length of the actions. Behavior that affects the community as a whole, as well as the ability of members of the community to function together rates a 4 or 5, depending on the length and severity of the social norm transgression. The measurements of the eight texts are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Severity and Repetition of Janteloven in Thorbjørn Egner’s Books

Title	1 st Instance	2 nd Instance	3 rd Instance	4 th Instance	5 th Instance
Karius og Baktus	3				
Doktor Dyregod	1	2	4		
Ole Jakob på Bytur	1	2			
Da Per var Ku	1				
Tommy og Elefanten	1				
Jumbo som Dru Ut i Verden	2	3			
Folk og Røvere i Kardemomme By	2	2	4	5	5
Klatremus og de Andre Dyrene i Hakke Bakke Skogen	2	5			

4. Case Presentation:

Egner's two longest works, *Folk og Røvere i Kardemomme By* and *Klatremus og De Andre Dyrene i Hakke Bakke Skogen*, are intended for slightly older audiences, and have more illustrations demonstrating Janteloven for adult audiences, as well as more mature storylines. Avant and Knutsen describe these as "miniature societies where the inhabitants are encouraged (or forced) to set the needs of the community before their individual needs" (1991; 451).

4.1. Folk og Røvere i Kardemomme By (1955)

Cardamom Town is an idyllic society where the people are pleasant and good natured towards each other, with the exception of Aunt Sophia. She thinks everyone in the city treats their responsibilities too trivially, including Police Master Bastian. Three robbers, Kasper, Jasper, and Jonathan, live outside the city in their cabin. They hate to work, so they rob the town every so often to get food for themselves and their pet lion. After the robbers kidnap Aunt Sophia to do their housework (then subsequently return her because of her bossy demeanor), they are discovered and arrested. During their time in jail, the three thieves are "socialized into the idyllic community of Cardamom Town and transformed into useful citizens who run the local fire department" (Avant and Knutsen 451). During the rehabilitation, Police Master Bastian lays down the main town law: "You must not pester others, but be friendly and considerate; otherwise you may do as you wish" (Egner 111).

In the city, Aunt Sophia is the main perpetrator of breaking Janteloven. On the town's celebration day a performer falls sick, and Aunt Sophia is asked to sing in her place. While Aunt Sophia insists that she has only one song—and it is *not* suitable for that day—Police Master Bastian encourages her to perform. The song follows, and Aunt Sophia proves correct; the song is certainly *not* fit for a community that takes pride in everyone being equally important. "Oh fiddlesticks o fiddlesticks, I'm angry and I'll frown! It's stuff and nonsense everywhere in Cardamom our town./ If only people were like me—everything's be good./ But no one is at all like me—they don't do as they should!" (39).

She continues to critique Police Master Bastian, saying he must be "a strict and angry man, and go about arresting folk as often as he can," and accuses him of falling asleep at night when the robbers come to town. She also criticizes tram conductor Puddleson for the cheerful manner he operates his business (39-40). Numerous Jante laws are broken in this example: Sophia considers herself better than others, greater than them, and even considers herself more capable than others at their respective jobs, suggesting that if they were like her they would be better at their duties. This receives a rating of 2, as the damage inflicted on her friends is strong, though not long-lasting. The response is almost comedic: "Almost everyone applauded, including Police Master Bastian, though a bit hesitantly" (40).

After Police Master Bastian, the baker, and the butcher discover the location and plans of the robbers, they capture them and put them in jail, despite the robbers' excuses. The robbers get a comfortable, warm room and food three times a day. Police Master Bastian even apologizes for the room being untidy at the moment. Mrs. Bastian brings them coffee and breakfast, and encourages them to tidy the cell while she cleans up from the meal. Jesper even has permission to take a trip once a day to the house to feed the lion (103-11). The hostel-like conditions of the jail reflect the egalitarian attitudes towards individuals. Even criminals are members of society, and deserve the same treatment as everyone else. The conditions the robbers are held under are much better than the mess they lived in while in solitude, which promotes an important message: even at the lowest rung in this city, it is far better to be a member of a society. These jail conditions would not have been possible without the support of the leaders of the community. Such heavy involvement earns a score of 4, as the measures of the many impact the conditions of the few.

Children in Norway are socialized to embrace the values embodied in Janteloven, which include caring for others and internalizing manners at a young age. When the three robbers kidnap Aunt Sophia to act as a housekeeper, she takes charge of the conversation and demands that they introduce themselves properly. She scolds Kasper when he insists he will speak exactly as he likes. "You are never to answer a lady back in that fashion." She rewards Jesper and Jonathan for their better manners. When she sees how messy their house is, she orders them to clean it—and themselves—up. Despite the fact they are her captors and she has no power over them, they do as she says. Conversely, while the robbers are under the charge of Mrs. Bastian, they respond well to her civil prompts and compassion. Kasper considers that "washing is kid's stuff, but seeing as Mrs. Bastian's so kind, then all the same, perhaps we ought to try it a bit" (108). This contrasts with the gruffness of Aunt Sophia, and the message to children is clear. Civil treatment is better for all involved than unpleasantness. The comparison between the women is

illustrated thus: the gruff Aunt Sophia considers herself better than others and gives orders she expects to be followed. Mrs. Bastian brings herself to the level of the robbers and tries to build them up from there. A rating of 5 is given, because the actions of multiple members of the society affect the robbers' long term prospects.

By the end of *Folk og Røvere I Kardemomeby*, the thieves are socialized into the idyllic community of Cardamom Town, and transformed into useful citizens after rescuing the light keeper's pets from a fire. They are freed for their service to the town, and are polite to all they meet, including Aunt Sophia. Jonathan becomes the fire chief, Kasper becomes the baker's assistant, and Jesper becomes a circus ringmaster. Kasper even marries Aunt Sophia. The happy ending is rated as 5, as the transformation of the robbers is complete. They are now fully functional members of society and can contribute. The converse of the third law of Jante is true in this scenario. Rather than the robbers believing they "art more than us," they are certainly no 'less' than anyone else either.

4.2. Klatremus og de Andre Dyrene i Hakke Bakke Skogen (1953)

In Hakke Bakke Forest, a community of animals go about their daily lives together, all while avoiding the carnivorous animals who live on the fringes of society. Two mice in particular, Morten and Klatremus, become tired of going about daily life under the threat of being eaten and decide to take action. Morten writes a set of laws for the forest, which is summed as: 1) all animals must be friends; 2) no one is allowed to eat anyone else; and 3) those who are idle and cannot get food for themselves may not take food from others. Klatremus objects to rule three, as he is used to taking cake and food from the other animals—including Morten. "But who shall someone take from then?" "From no one," Morten answered" (46-8). This establishes laws similar to the social policies in the egalitarian Scandinavian countries. When these measures are proposed to the rest of the animals in the forest, Bamsefar the Bear decrees that "what's done is done, and eaten is eaten. But from now on we say that all the animals in the forest will be friends and will not eat each other" (68). In effect, all animals are decreed to become vegetarians and may eat grass and vegetables. The law passes by a unanimous vote, even though Mikkil Fox declares it nonsense. This, of course, would be a good law if you are a vegetarian mouse, but not if you are a carnivorous fox. Nevertheless, the foxes of the forest are converted to vegetarianism in this fable. In this book the message is clear: social deviation will not be tolerated (Avant and Knutsen; 1991). The effects of this law are strong and long-lasting. Different from Egner's other books, *Klatremus* implements concrete laws that seek to change others' behaviors permanently. The long arm of the law creates a rating of 5, as it cannot be changed and affects all members of the forest community.

After the establishment of the forest laws, baby bear is stolen by nearby farmers who want to tame and raise him. It is with the newly-vegetarian Mikkil fox's help that the mice are able to rescue the bear. Children in Norway are socialized to embrace the values embodied in Janteloven, which include caring for others and participating in communal activities at an early age. Avant and Knutsen find that popular literature and songs for children emphasize what are considered "social virtues" in Norway. One of these virtues is camaraderie, which is found in the speeches after Bamsefar's son is found: "Morten and Klatremus, you shall always be my best friends," Bamsefar said. Morten agrees with "If the fox and Klatremus and you and I and everyone had not been friends, we could not have rescued your son from the farmers" (87). Pronouncing camaraderie and teamwork as virtues impact one's range of friends in a permanent manner, giving this instance a rating of 2.

5. Conclusion

After examining each case from the eight-book study, it can be found that each of Egner's books has at least one specific instance of behavior that applies to the Janteloven mindset. The instances that go against it are met with retribution that do not cease until the perpetrator has mended their actions or has been separated from society. This constant treatment in literature is supported by Sandemose himself, as he presents the prevalence of Janteloven in *A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks*: "The Law of Jante was not just merely a set of laws, it was the very core of the speech of the people; all they ever said could be traced back to the Law of Jante. This is Jante: each little soul's struggle for coequality and recognition, never without consciousness that all others are greater than he" (78). The messages of the books—their *cores*—hold the greatest examples of keeping community at the front of the mind.

Differences are handled carefully in the books, just as Avant and Knutsen find in their studies of diversity in the homogeneous Norway. Janteloven refers to the working class citizen's feelings of resignation and inferiority as proclaimed in the "laws" governing the fictional "everyman's small-town, Jante" (Woods 80). In smaller communities, the differences that separate citizens are exaggerated due to a lack of a wider context. Egner's descriptions of differences of attitude and physical differences can be linked to the work of these scholars; however, Woods claims that Egner and Sandemose as Scandinavians were no stranger to racial prejudices. To that end, in a

1935 article Sandemose finished a harsh description of a family of Chinese immigrants with, “I wonder if racial hatred can’t simply be explained by the fact that we are afraid of strange and different people” (qt. in Woods 81).

Scholars who have looked at this topic reflect the veiled antagonism towards diversity in a Janteloven-saturated culture. However, for diversity to be acknowledged there must first be a social norm from which to differ. While Avant and Knutsen focus on the effects of Janteloven based on physical and ideological differences, they make a key point in how the Norwegian societal norm is formed in childhood. When the lessons of the kindergarten have been learned—lessons taught in *Folk og Røvere* and *Klatremus*, where everyone sticks to the same diet and even the bad guys can become equal members of society by conforming to other’s expectations—children are ready for school.

Norwegian schools reflect the social democratic ideals of Norwegian society. All pupils go through a compulsory education in a universal system that champions equality. This may account for some of the conformity visible on Norwegian main streets” (1991, 252).

The implications of the research ultimately found that Thorbjørn Egner’s works hold a high level of instances where Janteloven is upheld. These books, used for decades in kindergartens, schools, and at home, suggest that the generations exposed to these books are more receptive to uphold Janteloven in their own communities. This supports the original hypothesis that the degree to which Janteloven-like behavior is present in Egner’s children’s literature can influence the attitudes of the children for whom his books acted as agents of socialization.

One significant limitation of this study was the relatively small sample of Egner’s work analyzed. Of the 17 children’s books written by Egner (not including text and song books), only eight were available at the time of research. Studies that include a wider sample of Egner’s works would further enhance understanding of Janteloven’s presence in children’s literature, and could be conducted at a time when the researcher has access to a Norwegian library or other source.

This study contains two primary possible sources of error. The first relates to the era in which these books were written. Post World War II Norway was a poor country and had not boomed as an oil-economic superpower. The attitudes reflected in Egner’s works may not represent the long-term trends of Norwegian attitudes. Janteloven, while generally present in Norwegian society, may have reached a peak during Egner’s publishing career. The second possible source of error lies in the confirmation bias of the author. While striving to remain impartial in reading Egner’s books, there is the possibility that the author favored evidence that supported beliefs on Janteloven’s effect on society. This may have resulted in a degree of attitude polarization, which could lead to a variance in the degree that Janteloven examples were scored on the fuzzy scale than if the study were conducted by another researcher.

Possible topics of study that can further enhance understanding of children’s literature as an agent of socialization can focus on the differences of attitudes towards Janteloven between generations that grew up with Egner’s books as agents of socialization, and generations which have less or no exposure to his books. Other studies can examine publishing trends in Norway from 1950 through 1980 to see whether there is a common theme of endorsing Janteloven in children’s books during this time period. Overall, examining the reception of audiences towards Janteloven behaviors and repercussions would further advance knowledge about this prevalent Scandinavian mindset. Researchers can also study trends of children’s literature in Denmark and Sweden during the time of Egner’s publications.

Ultimately, the view of Janteloven presented by Sandemose is dark. “Its effect was that of poison gas, slower perhaps, but more heartless. It would poison the soul without killing it utterly. In union there is strength. This united attitude rendered Jante successful in holding Jante down. All are equally big, but each equally assured of their insignificance” (78-9). Norwegians consider the Janteloven mindset to be a byproduct of their egalitarian society; sometimes something serious, sometimes something to joke about, but ultimately an attitude that keeps those who would try to usurp society’s peace in check. While Sandemose wrote the Janteloven laws with the intent to satirize the mindset and bring it to the attention of the Scandinavian people, his books resulted in an ownership of this mindset.

Today, Janteloven is a sociological term that is used to describe anti-individualistic behavior, and has been transferred to new generations through agents of socialization, including children’s literature. The findings of this study suggest that Egner’s literature, an agent of socialization among youths, contains numerous examples that can be used to enforce the Janteloven mindset in Norway. Detrimental or lauded, the Janteloven attitude remains a prominent force in Norway and Scandinavia as a whole, as well as a topic of sociological and literary focus.

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