

Ægte brøker (True fractions)

by
Jesper Wung-Sung

Dansklærerforenings Forlag, Copenhagen, 2009
191 pages

Synopsis:

Ægte brøker is an unblinking analysis of society seen through the eyes of two teenagers, Janus and Marcus. The novel's primary narrative unfolds in the 3 weeks from the day Marcus and Janus meet until the execution of a school shooting which they - '*the true fractions*', as they call themselves - believe will enable their generation to live their lives more 'truthfully'.

The plot traces the development of the friendship between Marcus and Janus: They meet as *Servilius Gylco* (Janus) and *Incitatus II.* (Marcus) on an exclusive internet portal, the *Forum Romanum*, where they engage in a furious intellectual debate on the fate of the obscure, ruthlessly powerful and violent Roman emperor, Caligula (AD 12-41). When they discover that – in the real world – they attend the same high school, they agree to meet in person.

Initially, it is only their fascination for Caligula that binds the two protagonists; they have nothing in common, except for their school, their isolation from society and their love for a girl, Anna, who is Marcus' girlfriend, but as the story unfolds, Marcus and Janus react proactively to each other and their situation in distinctly different ways:

Janus is a social misfit, riddled with pimples and a mop of unruly hair. He is perpetually clad in a trench coat and an academic underperformer, despite his superior intelligence. And he is hopelessly in love with Anna. He hates everybody – but most of all, he hates himself. He feels as if his life is reduced to a reality TV-show called *Live Janus' Life* in which he plays the part of the forlorn son, the *forte sore*, of his parents. He rebels with frustration and rage, giving vent to his anger through masturbation, graffiti and theft, but also tries to interact 'normally' with society by mowing the lawn, helping his dad build a carport, finding a job, getting a dog and leasing his own flat in town.

Marcus on the other hand is a muscular, good-looking sportsman. As opposed to Janus, he is an academic achiever and star of the football team with a beautiful and

loving girlfriend. But he is suicidal and mourns the death of his father; above all else, he values the loyalty of his dog, Sofus. His judgement of society is just as harsh as that of Janus, but he responds to his situation with violence and aggression. He plans the school shooting meticulously, and once Janus has proved his loyalty and strength to Marcus - epitomised by an 'initiation' in Ch XII, which depicts a race between the two teenagers - he involves Janus in his plans, and they form an intimate bond of friendship that is sealed by a pact to change their world.

The school shooting does not go as planned. The final sequence of the novel (p. 189-191) takes the form of a 'mental portrait' of Janus, as he sits with Marcus in the assembly hall. Janus shoots Marcus, or helps Marcus to shoot himself – the novel leaves this question open – and concludes with a scene of Anna, whose life Janus has conspired to spare, as she looks out over the town from the window of Janus' new flat and waits for Marcus to arrive for that meeting, which Janus has promised to arrange between them.

*

Plot structure:

The narrative structure of *Ægte Brøker / True Fractions* is based on three primary building blocks:

- A: *Prologue* (p.7-19): An introductory sequence unfolding online in a chat-room (*Forum Romanum*) where *Servilius Glyco* (Janus) and *Incitatus II* (Marcus) participate in an intellectual debate on the fate of the violent and obscure Roman Emperor, Caligula. This introduction sets the tone of the novel whilst simultaneously drawing an historical comparison between the relationship between Marcus and Janus on the one hand, and the relationship between Servilius Glyco and Caligula on the other.

- B: *Primary Narrative* (Ch. I-XXII): Tells the story of Janus and Marcus' friendship. It is told in the 3rd person from the alternate perspectives of Janus and Marcus and depicts the two teenagers' alienation from – and judgment of

– their society which ultimately prompts them to plan and execute a school shooting at their Gymnasium in Svendborg, Denmark.

C: *Mental portraits of Janus and Marcus*: A first person narrative from Marcus and Janus' alternative perspective on the day of the shooting itself. These portraits or 'camera shots' of the event are woven into the fabric of the primary narrative, i.e.:

10:12 am. Marcus

10:17 am. Janus

10:23 am. Marcus

10:28 am. Janus

10:31 am. Marcus

10:35 am. Janus

The 'mental portraits' pose an underlying question: *What goes through the mind of a 'school-shooter' as he roams the halls of his high-school with a loaded gun?*

Lin Falk van Rooyen
M.A, LL.M, Translator
Rudkøbing, Denmark