

Earthly

Jordisk

Presented by: Troels Thorborg Andersen

Since his first novel *Solar* (2018), a particular theme has been permeating the fictional world of Theis Ørntoft's stories: **The private is planetary. This phrase brings to mind the 1970s mantra that the private is political, but Ørntoft's stories are undeniably contemporary. While people in the 1970s feared natural disasters caused by hyper-industrialization and capitalism, today's individuals are grappling with the ongoing environmental and planetary destruction. Consequently, Ørntoft believes it is impossible to consider politics without acknowledging the planetary context.**

In *Jordisk* (2023), Ørntoft expands his literary exploration of the connection between the private sphere and the planetary system from an individual to a generational level. Whereas *Solar* was a story of individualism, *Jordisk* tells a story about family bonds. The novel spans three generations of a family from 1967 to 2036. It follows the story of a stern grandfather from the interwar generation, his daughter Alice who belongs to the infamous 1968 generation, and her children – the millennials Rhea, Joel and Miriam.

Especially notable is the portrayal of Alice's children, which is set in a fictional yet easily recognizable version of Copenhagen and Denmark in the early 2020s. It is thought-provoking in its analysis of how middle-class people of the 'global north' navigate their lives, fully aware of the consequences of overconsumption that they and the society around them are perpetuating.

Each chapter of *Jordisk* represents an epoch, a structure that mirrors the geological layers of Earth and the DNA string connecting the family members. The family's story is not told chronologically, but with each chapter, the novel delves deeper into the family history linking the characters together. Due to its epochal and layered structure, *Jordisk* could be described as a form of 'literary archaeology'. In each chapter, the reader glimpses another sediment of the universal or planetary system to which the characters and their actions belong. Therefore, the novel's central political claim is this universality. None of the characters play the role of a hero; they are all interconnected and influence each other's lives, both positively and negatively. If there is a protagonist, it must be Earth itself, impacting the characters mentally, emotionally and economically throughout their lives. Ørntoft's prose is very easy to read. The language is contemporary and free of too many idiosyncrasies, showing a great relevance of the subject matter of the novel.

It is understandable why *Jordisk* sparked a debate in Denmark about the political dimension of literature when it was published in 2023. Ørntoft has publicly refused to label himself as a political writer, yet he always ends up discussing politics and politicians in interviews on the radio or at literary festivals. Furthermore, his three novels (*Solar*, *Jordisk* and *Habitat* from 2025) all draw on diverse political theories from eco-feminism of Donna Haraway to the terrorist ideas of the

Unabomber Ted Kaczynski. From a narratological point of view it is also worth mentioning the apparent influence of Ursula Le Guin's "carrier bag theory of fiction".

Jordisk is a great example of how political thought can be portrayed in a 600-page novel without becoming ideological. Instead, *Jordisk* – along with Ørntoft's two other novels – raises questions that are often overlooked or intentionally ignored in the realm of everyday politics. For Ørntoft, the main focus of political thought and action lies in the spectrum between the emotional lives of individual human beings and the planetary system as a whole.

Theis Ørntoft was awarded the European Prize for Literature in 2024. *Jordisk* has not yet been translated into other languages.

LANGUAGE: Danish/Dansk

This title was not censored before publishing