

Nation Building and Folklore in Norway 1840 – 1905

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Abstract The article describes how modern European ideas of nationalism and democracy in the early and mid-nineteenth century inspired Norwegians to search for a national identity by collecting folk art that indicated the cultural differences between “us” and “them” —“them” referring to Europeans in general and the Danes in particular. Politically speaking, the difference from the Danes was obvious: never did Norway have feudal aristocracy nor bonded peasantry. The theory of the influence of climate and physical environment on culture and character helped create a specific sense of Norwegianness: the folklore of Norway was oral and had to be collected and written down, which was done by Asbjørnsen and Moe in the 1840s, and their collections accentuate the fairy tale as distinctly Norwegian because of its black humor, the talent-hidden hero and the graceful yet independent women characters. The fairy tales have successful endings; by contrast, the legends are more realistic and psychologically diverse. The language of tales and legends is a compromise between written Danish and Norwegian dialects. Ballads are also collected by Landstad and Croeger at the end of the 19th century, which portray courtly love and help to show that the Norwegian farmer was a subject of the King, not a serf like his Danish counterpart. Norwegian folk music and folk art in general inspired musicians and writers, and folk art was also significantly present in modern Norwegian politics as the new ‘National Left’ found its cultural and social identity in folklore. The emphasis on her “folk” identity became significant when Norway broke out of the union with Sweden in 1905.

Key words National identity; folk art; Norwegianness

Political Context

Norway differs from many other European nation states in that it has had no feudal aristocracy of its own since the Middle Ages. Our nobility died out and/or was absorbed into the anonymous masses of ordinary people through the devastating plague called “the Black Death”, that struck Norway in the year 1349. It has been claimed that somewhere between one third and two thirds of our population died from this disease. Another consequence of the plague was that the royal family died out, and the country drifted into a union with Denmark, which lasted from the fifteenth century until 1814.

But during the Napoleonic wars the “Twin Monarchy” of Denmark and Norway

sided with Napoleon — and lost. Therefore, the allied powers forced Denmark to cede Norway to Sweden, which had supported the victors and demanded Norway as a reward for their support. Significantly, these events took place when the modern ideas of nationalism and democracy had started to catch on in Europe. Traditionally, borders between states were decided according to the power of the old royal families — disregarding the various ethnic groups and their traditional territories. According to the emerging nationalist ideas, borders between states should coincide with those between the various “nations” or groups of individuals who shared some kind of collective identity. All those individuals who felt that they shared a territory as well as a common cultural heritage were to have their own “nation state”.

The heritage in question might be religion, language, history and/ or ethnicity — as in the nationalist ideas of *German Romanticism*. Such attitudes triggered the romantic endeavor to collect and analyse folk art with the intent of identifying the cultural differences between “us” and “them”. “Our” fairy tales and legends were assumed to be different from “theirs”, “our” folk music from “theirs”, etc. Therefore, “we” need our own state since “we” are essentially different from “them”. This type of national identity pictures the nation as a clan or an extended family: You are not free to choose your nationality because you are born into it; you can not leave it and enter other nations at random. Another ideological complex regarding nationality pictures the nation as a club or some kind of organization. The individuals belong to the nation because they share loyalty to its rules and regulations; accordingly, they are free to join or leave the nation according to their political convictions. This understanding of the nation state was an important element in the democratic ideas of the *French Enlightenment*. Both these types of nationalism mixed and intertwined throughout Europe during the nation building processes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and both of them became important in Norway during the nineteenth century.

The Urge Towards a National Identity

The political events subsequent to the Napoleonic Wars primarily inspired a boost of “French” political and democratic nationalism in Norway. This was because Norwegian leaders in 1814 had established a democratic constitution — with jurisdiction for Norway only, and this constitution was accepted by the Swedes. Hence, Norway now had its own legislation and its own democratic institutions. It was mainly in questions of foreign policy that Sweden insisted on having supremacy. This gave Norway a degree of independence that it had never had under Denmark. A Norwegian Parliament passed the laws, imposed the taxes, and decided how the money was to be spent. Nationalist ideas of the French Enlightenment type thus became part of the elite’s understanding of its national identity.

But gradually French Enlightenment nationalism was felt to be insufficient for the young Norwegian nation state. The problem was that during the 400 years of union with Denmark the political, intellectual and economic elites in both countries had become so closely knit together that they essentially shared the same culture. However, the modern nationalist sentiments presupposed distinct cultures in every nation. As

Norway now understood itself as an independent nation, it developed an urge for determining the essence of Norwegian-ness as something different from Danish-ness. Surprisingly, it was less important to be different from Sweden — our new union partner — than to differ from the Danish. Consequently, an important goal for Norwegian elites during the nineteenth century was to detect and define a genuinely Norwegian culture.

This is where it becomes relevant that Norway had no feudal aristocracy. The “twin monarchy” of Denmark-Norway had been a centralized one with political institutions mostly located in Denmark. Partly because of this, only Denmark had a social class of noble aristocracy. In Norway there were, of course, representatives of the Crown in the form of the clergy of the state church — and representatives of the judiciary. There was also a social segment of more or less well to do merchants and land owners. But these families did not belong to the nobility, and they were so few and so sparsely scattered over the relatively large Norwegian territory that they did not develop a distinct culture of their own. As elsewhere in early modern Europe they were split between the popular ways of their local regions and the more or less aristocratic ways of their equals in other countries — in our case particularly Denmark.

So, when Norwegian elites were to start their nation building process, and ultimately define “the essence of Norwegian-ness”, they lacked the precious symbols of national pride that the feudal powers of Central Europe could highlight during their nation building processes. The Russians had their Kremlin castle, their St. Basil’s Cathedral, their Winter Palace etc; the French had Versailles and the Louvre, the Germans the Cathedral of Cologne etc. , etc. Almost all other nations had a marvelous heritage inherited from their aristocratic elites — palaces, statues, parks, theatres, opera houses — as well as an artistic and intellectual heritage of classical music, ballets, theatres, authors, scholars, all of which they could cherish as outstanding symbols of their national heritage. Norway had almost nothing of the kind.

What should Norway do when the urge for self definition was acute? Norwegian nation builders basically pursued two strategies. One of them was to strive towards elitist accomplishments in arts and sciences that were equal to those from the old and well established nation states, like France and England. The other strategy, which will be elaborated here, was to cherish its people as unique. In this they were partly inspired by the ancient European theory of climate which posited that the various peoples of the world were fundamentally influenced by their environment. This had supposedly made the peoples of the north more tough and sturdy than those of the south, and because of their physical strength they dared to be honest, etc. This comprised an entire cluster of excellent qualities. The theory had probably gained ground because the intellectuals who shaped it were from the south, and did not really know the northerners, whereas they knew their next door neighbours all too well.

This theory suited Norwegian nation builders well since Norway is situated north of Denmark. Besides, Norway is a rocky and rugged landscape whereas Denmark is lush and flat. According to the climate theory, then, Norwegians were clearly physically superior, since they managed to survive under such harsh natural conditions. Another point — having no connection with the theory of climate — was that since

Denmark had a feudal aristocracy and Norway did not, a considerable portion of the Danish population in the countryside had traditionally been feudal serfs up until the eighteenth century whereas in Norway a large portion of the farmers had owned the land they cultivated. This was considered an important asset during an era searching for democracy.

But the point that Norwegians were different had to be elaborated and documented: How were Norwegians special? Many answers were sought to explain this; here I will pursue the theory that the presumed essential difference between nations pervades their folk art. Thus, the folk art of every nation was viewed as essentially different from that of all other nations because it reflected the “national character” of the culture that had produced it. It became particularly important with the verbal folklore of Norway. This was partly due to the question of language. Our medieval written language had died out during the union with Denmark, so that Norwegians from that point on used Danish as their written language. All that was left of a truly Norwegian language was the oral dialects. Therefore, our verbal folklore was a truly Norwegian literature since it was conveyed orally. Thus, it was deeply fascinating to the romantic nation builders; not only could it reveal our national character, it was also our only verbal art in the Norwegian language. But, since literacy was still a privilege of the elites, popular folklore lacked social prestige. If it were to serve as a commonly accepted national symbol, it had to be presented to the elites and accepted by them as admirable in some way. In other words, it had to be written down and published, but the only written language available was that of the old oppressors; in addition, this language was felt to be quite remote from the folklore it was supposed to convey.

Fairy Tales

The first important collection of fairy tales published in Norway was done by Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe. They published several small collections of fairy tales during the 1840s, and an enlarged second edition in 1852 with an introduction by Moe. The reason that Moe gives for collecting and publishing fairy tales has a clear nationalist aim: He is well aware that the fairy tale genre shares many of the same qualities in many nations. One might say that he anticipates some basic insights concerning the Indo-European fairy tale developed by the Russian “formalist” Vladimir Propp almost a century later in 1968: The typical tale about youngsters encountering supernatural obstacles to their becoming a married couple, has the same basic structure on most of the Eurasian continent as far as narration and personae are concerned. But even though Moe recognises this general similarity across national borders, he is convinced that a fairy tale version recorded in any one nation portrays the “national character” of that nation. In his view, if one at some time in the future managed to acquire an all encompassing collection of absolutely all Norwegian fairy tales, one would at the same time have recorded all facets of the Norwegian national character (Moe 63 – 64).

However, this remains a general hypothesis; he is not very specific. But he does mention a few qualities in Norwegian fairy tales that he considers typical of Norwegians. One of them is a tendency to hide one’s talents; Typically, the hero of the tale

is commonly thought of as a nobody in the village, but precisely he is the chosen one — he is the only one who has the qualities necessary for the magic challenge of the tale. Similarly, Moe seems to think, Norwegians are reluctant to “show off”; they pretend to be ordinary; some peculiar modesty keeps them from demonstrating their true capacity in public.

Moe also talks of the humor in the tales. His point is that it is rugged and harsh — with an almost absurd contempt for danger — even for the devil! In several tales the devil is exposed as the clown or fool of the story, who is ridiculed and tortured in various ways by the hero. — No doubt, Moe here makes a correct observation of a certain type of Norwegian fairy tales. But his observation is hardly relevant for the Indo-European fairy tale type about the young couple defying magic obstacles to get married. His example is from a type of tale that specialises in ridiculing generally accepted norms and is thus related to the European tradition of carnivalism. Regardless, Moe claims that this type of tale is more hilarious and more fearless of taboos in the Norwegian tradition than in other nations, and he tries to explain it by referring to the tough living conditions of Norwegians; nobody could survive such a nature without a solid dose of black humor.

Moe does not mention a quality of the fairy tale hero, which has been commonly celebrated by later generations. As individualism and liberalism gained ground in our economy from the latter half of the eighteenth century, the fairy tale hero was seen as a symbol of the “self made man”. He sees the opportunities that his more conventional competitors ignores, and achieves success against all odds. This quality was hardly understood as something solely Norwegian; still, associating the “self made” bourgeois with the fairy tale hero was quite popular in Norway for many generations.

Moe also praises Norwegian fairy tales for the way they portray women. In particular, he claims that the Cinderella type is more graceful in certain Norwegian fairy tales than the corresponding heroines of fairy tales from other nations. This point was probably intended as a courtesy to Norwegian women: As fairy tale personae portray national character, and as the Norwegian Cinderella is more graceful than the Cinderellas of other nations, it should indicate that Norwegian women, in real life, are more ... etc. !

This point no doubt reveals the good will of the scholar as well as the values of his time. But it might be added that recent research gives a different picture. Actually, the bride of the young couple with the magic adversaries is in Norwegian fairy tales not a submissive object of harassment like the Snow White or the Cinderella of the Grimm brothers — who appear to win the prince because they accept being abused. The Norwegian fairy tale bride is different. She takes control from the moment the hero shows up with the intention of rescuing her, but with no idea of how to go about it. Almost always the girl has to tell him what to do; she knows about the magic remedies he needs and she more or less takes command. Then the boy kills the ogre, to be sure, but he could not have done so without her help. In other words, here we do not meet an active hero and a passive heroine; we meet a couple who function reciprocally; they want each other, and they work together¹. Does this feature reflect the national character of Norwegian women? It is undoubtedly valid for

some of them. But Snow Whites as well as female strategists are probably found in all nations. In the fairy tale universe all personae are highly stylised; they have no psychological depth and hardly any emotions.² In short, fairy tale personae are not realist portraits, but fantasies representing wishful dreams as well as fears and conflicts. Still, admittedly, it is noteworthy that the cunning heroine fantasy was popular among Norwegian tellers of tales during the first half of the nineteenth century, while the Snow White fantasy was popular among the sources of the Grimm brothers. But it is hard to infer any further conclusions about the cultural causes of this difference.

Legends

The picture given by Norwegian fairy tales of the assumed national character was, obviously, quite flattering. This is because the fairy tale genre, as I mentioned, conveys wishful fantasies of success. The protagonist encounters almost insurmountable challenges throughout most of the story, but it is an obligatory prerequisite of the genre that he or she succeed in the end. This is very different in the legend genre. Legends can be accounts of any remarkable event, and there are various genres of legends. Those that have entered the Norwegian literary canon were collected by Jørgen Moes friend and coeditor of fairy tales, Peter Christen Asbjørnsen. Most of these legends tell us about fatal encounters between humans and supernatural beings that, according to popular animistic belief, “live” in nature uncontrolled by man or culture. Legends differ from fairy tales in that they are not obvious fantasies, but are typically understood as true stories about real events that took place in history with such and such a person, at such and such a place, and at such and such a time.

To the extent that these legends portray Norwegians, they give us an entirely different picture from that of the fairy tale. The protagonist of fairy tales is absurdly courageous and always an optimist, with every good reason given that a happy end is guaranteed. Unlike the hero or heroine of fairy tales the protagonist of a legend has a soul; we may well refuse to believe in his or her story, but we do believe in their psychological experience. Also, we may consider him or her ignorant, simple minded, superstitious and/or hysterical. But we accept that according to popular belief in the culture that produced the genre, magic encounters do occur, resources to withstand the supernatural are limited, and the outcome usually fatal. With those cultural assumptions given, we accept that the psychological realism of the tale is convincing; we recognise ourselves in the fear and despair of the people involved. And we accept that the protagonist of legends has every good reason not to be optimistic, courageous or resourceful.

What does this kind of folklore imply for the search for a national character? Obviously, the character types that the nation builders wished to discern in fairy tales were quite the opposite of those of the legends. And it is quite understandable that nationalist enthusiasts were reluctant to establish a too close connection between legends and a national character. A possible connection was more or less repressed until the “fin de siècle” generation of authors from the 1890s who searched for an understanding of the subconscious, and paved the way for Sigmund Freud and psychoanaly-

sis.³

However, the narrative technique pursued by Asbjørnsen modified the picture of Norwegians from the gloom and anxiety of the legends proper. He almost always renders the legends in a “frame” story about a collector of legends, who resembles himself — an intellectual who does not belong to the social groups that believe in them, but who has some kind of skeptical fascination for them. The narrator, therefore, approaches the tellers of legends with some ambiguity — he is always charmed by them, but also slightly ironic. Some romantic poets saw the people as mysteriously pervaded by the “spirit” of their natural environment — primitive man and nature were different manifestations of the same underlying spiritual reality. Asbjørnsen was hardly a romantic in this sense. He remained an Enlightenment rationalist. But he observed the close ties between those who shared their legends with him and the nature they lived in. To these people it made sense to fear nature; they knew that they did not control it — it controlled them — to the extent that they depended on it. No wonder the enigmas of nature could take the shape of hallucinations. In spite of his subtle irony the pictures he gives of these story telling milieus strike the reader as quite realistic.

But above all, his narrative technique expands the focus of the text concerning the quest for a national character. In his reflections on fairy tales Moe takes for granted that they reflect the characteristics of the illiterate masses — implying that the essence of Norwegian-ness dwells in the lower social classes. But Asbjørnsen’s legends remind the reader that the Norwegian population is split; it does not only consist of illiterates; it also includes the social elites — those who collect tales and read them; and the nation must come to grips with the challenges and potentials of its own diversity.

As mentioned above the written language in Norway was Danish. However, to Asbjørnsen and Moe, in the 1840s and 1850s it appeared as though the Norwegian essence of their folklore evaporated if they rendered it in Danish. They wanted to convey in writing some of the atmosphere of the Norwegian culture that had inspired their material. Therefore, they compromised between written Danish and spoken Norwegian. Because both Danish and Norwegian have developed from Old Norse, the two languages share most of their vocabulary. And all those words that are quite similar in both languages Asbjørnsen and Moe spelled according to Danish orthography — in order not to make their texts too strange to their readers. But at the same time they inserted innumerable terms and phrases and even syntactical patterns from Norwegian dialects into their Danish writing. This provoked many readers; it was felt to be vulgar and rude. But it encouraged young authors like Henrik Ibsen and many others to introduce Norwegian elements into their Danish. All in all, Asbjørnsen and Moe started a development in the history of our language away from the Danish towards the so-called “bokmål” — the Norwegian written language that is most widespread today.

Ballads

During the nineteenth century our nation builders were proud of our relatively egalitarian democracy, and quite content that we had had no Norwegian nobility since the

middle ages. But in 1853, the year after the second edition of Asbjørnsen and Moe's fairy tales was published, a volume appeared, which to some extent may have shed an air of noblesse on the Norwegians after all. It was a collection of popular ballads, collected by Magnus Brostrup Landstad and Olea Croeger. They were epic ballads; it is commonly believed that they were meant for singing and dancing in a chain or circle; this tradition has lasted until today in the Faroe Islands, but in no other Scandinavian milieu was the dance tradition in use when the ballads were written down. In Norway this tradition was revived towards the end of the nineteenth century. Most of the ballads relate love stories from a highly stylised milieu of aristocratic courts: A conflict may arise between two knights who love the same noble bride or between a noble wooer and the king, who is the father of the bride, etc. The ballads also introduce motifs from animistic legends into this aristocratic milieu, letting the magic encounters of the legend involve young aristocrats who as a rule suffer the tragic outcome of the legend. For example, a young knight travels through the forest to invite guests for his wedding with a young woman of his own standing; then all of a sudden he is approached by the queen of the elves, who tries to seduce him; he resists her, but she strikes him with some mortal illness; his death makes both his fiancée and his mother die from grief!

Most nineteenth century scholars believed that this genre originated in the Middle Ages, and that the preserved texts were transmitted orally for the generations it took before they were written down. A particularly great number were written down in Denmark during the sixteenth century. At the time it was fashionable among young Danish aristocrats to keep hand written poetry books, and in these books a great number of ballads were written down. Because of their sixteenth century poetry books Denmark has preserved a larger number of ballads than any other Scandinavian country, and it was commonly believed that the genre was originally Danish, and to a lesser extent was spread from Denmark to the other Scandinavian countries. Some scholars have also questioned the theory of a medieval origin for these ballads.⁴

Nearly all Norwegian ballads were written down during the nineteenth century and almost all of them derive from singers of the farming class in the county of Telemark. The Swedish scholar Bengt R. Jonsson has argued that the Nordic ballad genre did not originate in Denmark, but in Norwegian courtly circles during the 1280s, where it was inspired by romances from Norman England. It soon spread from Norway to the other Scandinavian countries, and remained fashionable in the aristocracy for a relatively short period of time. But it then sifted down into the farming class, which preserved it orally for centuries.⁵

Even though nineteenth century scholars generally assumed that the Nordic ballad was predominantly Danish, I believe that the publication of a large volume of Norwegian ballads in Norwegian dialects acquired just as great an importance in the nineteenth century nation building process of Norway as the much larger collection of ballads had in Denmark. That is because Denmark already had a vast heritage from its noble aristocracy that included castles, cathedrals, theatres, scholars, authors and other artists. Thus, the Danish ballads of courtly love were only one other treasure from its glorious past. In Norway the culture of courts and kings belonged to a very

remote past. But now the Norwegian ballad genre could awaken fantasies of such a glory in our society, too. I believe that several lines of thinking worked together in this connection: Firstly, the discovery that there were Norwegian ballads, too, not only Danish, strengthened the feeling of having a cultural heritage of a comparable cultural level as that of the envied counterpart. Secondly, the assumption that the ballad genre was medieval strengthened the idea that Norway was an old nation — with a cultural continuity since the Middle Ages. Thirdly, one might enjoy some blissful associations with the setting of the ballad genre, which indicates wealth, noble characters and gallantry; since this was thought of as a national heritage, the nation as such may have been attributed some of that courtly glory. And, finally, the fact that the singers of these ballads up through the centuries had come from the farming class, associated the ballad universe with the Norwegian farmer. Enlightenment writers had been very aware that because the typical Norwegian farmer owned the land he cultivated, he was a direct subject of the King — like the continental nobility — and unlike the serfs of feudal Europe, who primarily were the subjects of their land owners. Now a romantic generation ascribed a mix of noble pride and poetic genius to the Norwegian farmer, suggesting that he has an intuitive feeling for the spiritual essence of all things. We have some convincing examples in a few poems by J. S. Welhaven (“Eivind Bolt”, “Harald fra Reine”, both from the 1850s). Similar examples are found in some of Henrik Ibsen’s early plays (particularly *Sancthansnatten*, 1852, and *Olaf Liljekrans*, 1857).⁶

Folklore and Nation Building

The more subtle effects of Norwegian folk art on the history of the nation are too complex to clarify in detail here. Still, I want to mention two aspects where folklore played a significant role; one is its influence on the cultural endeavors of the educated elites of various arts and the other one is its influence on our political history.

It is hardly surprising that folk art stimulated the fine arts of the last two centuries in a variety of directions. Folk music inspired composers from Ole Bull and Edvard Grieg of the nineteenth century to Fartein Valen, Eivind Groven and Geirr Tveitt of the twentieth century. Folk traditions in coloring and ornamentation in textiles, painting, wood carving and architecture may still be recognized in modern Norwegian arts and handicrafts. And motifs from our epic folklore genres were popular in pictorial arts towards the end of the nineteenth century. Gerard Munthe, Theodor Kittelsen, Erik Werenskiöld are only three of the numerous outstanding artists who used folklore motives in their pictures.

Among our authors it is particularly the tragic conflicts of the legends that had a lasting appeal. As mentioned above legend motives were used by the romantics Welhaven and Ibsen in the 1850s to illustrate the subconscious, supposedly influenced by the intimate relation between nature, mind, and neo-Platonic “spirit”. Ibsen also pursued some of the same ideas in his symbolist dramas of the 1880s and 1890s, such as *Rosmersholm*, *The Lady from the Sea*, and *Little Eyolf*.⁷ In the 1890s legend motifs were taken up by a new generation of writers, but now the conflicts were not simply between man and nature but within man, and between individuals who live in very

narrow social contexts and who are at the same time exposed to extremely tough living conditions. A few examples are Jonas Lie, particularly his two short story collections *Ogres (Troll)*, Arne Garborg with his epic cycle of poems called *The Fairy (Haugtussa)*, and Hans E. Kinck with several of his short story collections, among which *Bat Wings (Flaggermusvinger)* is the best known.

Thus, Norwegian educated artists from Romanticism and onwards pursue a goal of transforming the folk art heritage, which they feel is genuinely national, into the various genres of contemporary western elite arts. It is as though there has been an urge among artists to interpret the heritage of their illiterate ancestors through the techniques of their own specific art forms. In a world of progressing individualism this means that much of Norwegian art during the last 200 years has combined an obvious desire for expressing the individuality of the artist with an equally strong desire to belong to an ancient collective tradition.

But Norwegian folk art has not only influenced artists and other culture workers. It is very likely that it also during a few important decades influenced Norwegian political history. For a long time the yearning for a national identity primarily appealed to the educated professionals and the higher bourgeoisie. But from around 1860 these ideas caught on in new segments of society. The main reason for this was probably that the population became more mobile, both geographically and socially. People moved from the countryside to towns and cities. In addition, education improved, so that more people with a common background got an education that moved them into higher social positions. An example is the teaching profession, which experienced considerable growth during the latter half of the nineteenth century. This resulted in a new “intelligentsia”, with its background in the common people; they knew the culture of the people from the inside at the same time as they acquired knowledge about the assumptions and values of the old upper class. Therefore, this social segment could take a mediating role between the classes; they could explain upper class norms to the people and claim social or cultural improvements for the poor.

However, during the last decades of the nineteenth century and up until 1905 Norway was split and divided in several conflicts. Two of them were closely connected. One was whether or not Norway should secede from the union with Sweden, and the other one was the attempts from a leftist opposition to curbe the political power of the educated professionals, who worked for the government and tended to favour the existing union. In 1905 the opposition won, and Parliament decided that Norway should leave the union with Sweden.

To a large extent this was a class conflict within Norway, where “the rising class” and their spokesmen attacked the old upper class. What is interesting in our context is that nationalist arguments were employed in this predominantly social conflict. The professionals were accused of lacking patriotism — not only were they loyal to the Swedish king, but they also sympathized with the Danish cultural heritage. Their counterparts were called the “National Left”, and defined themselves as good Norwegians. It was a living sentiment in the period that the Norwegian population was comparable to “two nations” — which, according to nationalist theory, must have different cultures. Those who were loyal to the Swedes and cherished the Danish her-

itage were one nation. “The National Left” was the other. Now the time had come for the true Norwegians to take over and push the old ruling class aside! But the main point here is that “the National Left” to a considerable extent identified with the Norwegian folk art tradition. Ironically, most of them had probably inherited their veneration for it from the old upper class intellectuals who collected folk traditions a generation earlier. But, since then, the knowledge about folk arts, and the official admiration for it, had become widespread; some folklore had been included in a reader for public schools from the early 1860s, — a fact which provoked considerable resentment, by the way. Still, in the heat of the political conflicts around the turn of the century there is hardly any doubt that folk art by the ideologists of “the National Left” was understood as their culture in some very essential sense. The genres of the elite arts were international, and were shared by too many. Their “national” art gave them a class identity which no elite art could give them. Therefore, I believe one may assume that Norwegian folk art — folklore being a vital part of it — gave “the National Left” movement added self confidence in the political feuds that lead up to the secession of Norway from the union with Sweden in 1905. As a matter of fact, it is probably true that folk arts enjoy more veneration in Norway even today — relatively speaking — than it does in many other European nations.

Notes

1. For detailed, see Johan Einar Bjerckem, *Kjønnsrollene i trønderske undereventyr* (Oslo: Novus, 1996).
2. These observations are made by Max Lüthi in his book *Das europäische Volksmärchen. Form und Wesen* (Bern, München: Francke Verlag, 1947).
3. Confer below the discussions concerning Ibsen, Lie, Garborg, and Kinck.
4. Refer to Michael Barnes, *Draumkvæde. An edition and study* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1974).
5. The general idea is from Bengt R. Jonsson, *Om Draumkvædet och dess datering* (Stockholm: Svenskt visarkiv, 1996).
6. Confer below the discussion concerning Ibsen.
7. See Nina Schartum Alnæs, *Varulv om natten. Folketro og folkediktning hos Ibsen* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2003).

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