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## Bjerregaard's (and Thrane's, Wergeland's, Aasen's, Ibsen's, Bjørnson's, and Garborg's) *Fjeldeventyret* (1825, 1844, 1853, 1857, 1865, and 1925)

In 1825 the cultural elite in Christiania hailed Henrik Anker Bjerregaard and Waldemar Thrane's *Fjeldeventyret* as the first Norwegian national drama. In the century that followed concerted efforts were made to maintain this light musical drama's status as a foundational national text, yet today it has all but disappeared from the canon. This paper explores the ways in which major literary figures such as Henrik Wergeland, Henrik Ibsen, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Ivar Aasen, and Arne Garborg attempted to rework and frame the text. I will consider two modes of translation or adaptation: on the one hand Bjerregaard's influential transformation of certain topographical features into consciously nationalist literary motifs, and on the other hand the strategies that the other authors employed to strengthen the status of *Fjeldeventyret* as a foundational text.

Writing in 1966, Knut Nygaard argues that "*Fjeldeventyrets* litteraturhistoriske betydning ligger ikke bare i det at det var det første fullstendige norske scenestykke skrevet etter 1814 som ble fremført i Thalias tempel. Det var også det første levedyktige norske dikterverk med norsk natur og folkeliv, norsk språktone og norske mennesketyper".<sup>1</sup> Bjerregaard built his national drama on eighteenth-century models, particularly Holberg's comedies and Ewald's *Fiskerne*, with a keen sense of both the nuances of social status and the cultural divide between country and city dwellers. The play serves as a primer that instructs urban viewers and readers, who were otherwise culturally oriented toward Copenhagen, in what aspects of the rural landscape and culture they should embrace as symbols for their emerging Norwegian identity. This instruction is facilitated primarily through the three young urban

tourists in the play who are mistaken by the local under-sheriff to be a pack of thieves.

Christiania residents Albek, Hansen, and Finberg each represent a different approach to gaining mastery over the rural topography: Albek paints landscapes, Hansen botanizes, and Finberg claims an ethnographic interest in peasants that is manifested primarily in terms of erotic exploits. All three approaches would become codified with the rise of tourism as an industry later in the century.<sup>2</sup> Hansen's plant collecting creates associations to early modern topographical writers and the Enlightenment infatuation with taxonomy. Albek's subjective appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of nature resonates with Romanticism. Finberg, on the other hand, is a cynical exploiter. He admits outright that the mountains have no appeal to him without the presence of peasants, to which Hansen replies sarcastically "Især de smukke Fjeldpiger".<sup>3</sup> Finberg is no better than a seducer, and even Hansen sees the mountains primarily as a resource to be plundered—a "Guldgrube"<sup>4</sup> of botanical specimens. Bjerregaard encourages the reader to identify with Albek, who is also the romantic lead in the play's intrigue. Albek gathers the total effect of the mountain region in his portfolio of sketches:

Hvilke herlige Prospekter! see dette! – Den stolte Klippe til Høire og den skummende kridhvite Fos, som styrter frem mellem en forgaet Verdens ruiner – den herlige, duftende Fyrreskov i Forgrunden og Sneefjeldet høit i baggrunden! – See dette! det klare Fjeldvand, hvori hine underlige Kæmpeformer speile sig – og her Sæterhytterne paa den grønne kratbevoxede Flade; – O det er en herlig Egn!<sup>5</sup>

Albek's repeated appeal to look at and appreciate the landscape that he depicts in his drawings functions as a *mise en abyme* in a play whose primary purpose is to instill national sentiment in the minds of its audience through contemplation of the rural landscape. Albek lists a number of now stereotypical topographical features that were still in the process of becoming codified in 1825: cliffs, waterfalls, pine forests, snowy mountains, mountain lakes, and of course the *seter* or summer dairy, which is the only one of these topographical features that is actually represented in the diegetic space of the play.

We first meet Albek, Hansen, and Finberg at such a *seter*, a liminal place that is distinct from the rural farming community, the urban center, and from the untouched wilderness alike, and it is here in this liminal outpost of civilization that all of the social strata depicted in the play first meet. I have argued elsewhere for the special status of the *seter* as an imaginative locus in Norwegian literature, a place where

Norwegian national identity as separate from Swedish or Danish could be imagined into being.<sup>6</sup> Logistically speaking, for the urban elite the *seter* along with the hunting cabin became a crucial point of access to the high mountain plateau or *vidde* that during the first half of the nineteenth century came to be viewed as uniquely symbolic of Norwegian identity.

Writing a quarter century later in 1852, Nicolai Ramm Østgaard notes with sarcasm: “[...] man har blot behøvet at sætte frem en Smørbut og en Melkeringe med behørige attributer af Luur og Horn og Bjeldeklang under Overskrift: ‘En norsk Sæter’ og strax er Publicum bleven henrykt og har raabt: Hvor prægtig! hvor nationalt! [...]”.<sup>7</sup> And indeed, the most frequently performed Norwegian-composed dramatic piece during the nineteenth century was Claus Pavels Riis’ *Til Sæters* from 1850. Knut Nygaard posits that this fascination with the *seter* has its origins in the 1820s: “Flintoes landskapsbilder med folkelivsinnsdrag danner sammen med Bjerregaards og Thranes seter-idyll den egentlige opptakt til den nasjonal-romantiske periode i vår kunst og diktning. Seteridyllen var *det* i *Fjeldeventyret* som vakte den store begeistring.”<sup>8</sup> Perhaps it is the nationalistically and erotically charged locus of the *seter* itself that made these otherwise mediocre musical dramas so popular. And similarly, perhaps it is the activation of the *seter* motif as a potent national symbol that distinguished them from the proto-nationalist texts produced by earlier generations of writers associated with Det norske Selskab in Copenhagen. Writing in a different context, Stephen J. Walton suggests that “[...] vi kan setja opp kunstverk som Bjerregaards *Fjeld-Eventyr* (1825) og J.C. Dahls bilete ‘Vinter ved Sognefjord’ frå 1827 [...] som symbolske startskot for den eigentlege nasjonale tenkjemåten”.<sup>9</sup> And indeed Bjerregaard exhibits a surprisingly self-conscious and insistent sense of national identity in the period after 1814. Einar Høigård argues that it is Bjerregaard—rather than Wergeland or Bjørnson—who is the true guiding spirit behind the annual public celebration of the Norwegian constitution, which after an early rocky start had its breakthrough in 1826 at Bjerregaard’s instigation.<sup>10</sup>

It should come as no surprise that Henrik Wergeland wrote an epilog to the play for the 1844 production staged by Det dramatiske Selskab in Christiania. Despite a sixteen-year age difference Bjerregaard and Wergeland were close friends who supported each other staunchly. Bjerregaard was also one of the primary sources of inspiration for Wergeland’s call during the 1830s for a new literature that focused on Norwegian themes, language, and identity.<sup>11</sup> Even Wergeland’s last

work, the play *Fjeldstuen*, which he dictated in part from his deathbed, is closely related to Bjerregaard's *Fjeldeventyret*, both in terms of genre and theme.

Wergeland's brief epilog is meant as a humorous, metadramatic homage to Bjerregaard and his collaborator, the composer Waldemar Thrane. Wergeland transports the sheriff and under sheriff to Christiania a year after the events that transpired in *Fjeldeventyret*. While in town they attend a performance of *Fjeldeventyret* that wounds their pride. Only after they happen upon the urbane Finberg and Hansen, who express amusement at the fun Bjerregaard has at their expense, do the two rural figures accept being the butt of Bjerregaard's jokes. The epilog concludes with a song of praise to Bjerregaard and Thrane, who although both deceased by 1844, appear in ghostly form among the audience to soak up admiration for their work: "I deres Aasyn straal'er Fryd: / de see at Folket ei kan glemme / Modersmaalets den søde Lyd / men tryllebindes af dets Stemme".<sup>12</sup> It is symptomatic that Wergeland emphasizes the importance of the native language, and he refers to it in every one of the song's five stanzas. Any references to class difference and landscape are reduced to the chorus of the fourth stanza: "I Folkets bryst der boer den Klang, / som gjennem Eventyret strømmer. / Folket ved Fjeldpigens søde Sang / i sine Dales skjød sig drømmer".<sup>13</sup> That Wergeland does not emphasize Bjerregaard's contribution to the cultivation of nature in Norwegian identity-building may have something to do with what Theodor Caspari many years ago identified as "Det Universale ved Wergelands Naturfølelse".<sup>14</sup> Whereas the *seter* figures prominently in important mid-nineteenth century works such as the poetry of Welhaven, Asbjørnsen's *Huldreeventyr og Folkesagn*, Bjørnson's *Synnøve Solbakken*, and Collett's *Amtmandens Døttre*, there is little evidence that Wergeland was at all interested in the *seter* per se as a national symbol.<sup>15</sup>

Henrik Ibsen, on the other hand, was deeply interested, at least to the extent that the *seter* represented ostensibly authentic folk culture. In 1857, only a few months after taking over as the director of Kristiania norske Theater, Ibsen staged *Fjeldeventyret* in a production that included Wergeland's epilog.<sup>16</sup> Ibsen supplemented this production further by adding a prolog of his own, which he published in *Illustreret Nyhedsblad*. This prolog is not a dramatic piece, but rather a poem in seven stanzas that attempted to place *Fjeldeventyret* and the cultural contribution made by Bjerregaard and Thrane in a historical perspective. In the first stanza Ibsen stressed the groundbreaking nature of Bjerregaard's focus on peasants: "Det er ei længe siden, – det mindes vel endnu, – / Da Folkelivets Verden stod fremmed for vor hu, / Da Bondens gamle

Kvæder, da Lurtonens Klang / Udenfor Bygden aldrig hørtes engang”.<sup>17</sup> Regarding the appropriateness of folk culture as an artistic subject, Ibsen asked the rhetorical question “Kan heri det Æsthetiske komme til sin Ret?”<sup>18</sup> Whereas according to Ibsen other writers mistakenly tried to merge native folklore with the classical tradition, Bjerregaard and Thrane gained their inspiration directly from Norwegian nature and thus created true, not to mention truly Norwegian, poetry: “de har blundet en Midsommernat / Og drømt om Nattens Kvæder ved den susende Fos, / Og det, de der fik høre, de sang igjen for os // Ja, -- saa sprang Digtet frem fra den fædrelandske Grund; / Det blev den første Fuglesang i Norges Foraarslund”.<sup>19</sup> Although Gudleiv Bø is right to point out that Ibsen had a problematic relationship to the ideological underpinnings of National Romanticism from the very beginnings of his engagement with it, his enthusiasm for *Fjeldeventyret* articulates the ways in which he still in 1857 supported it as a cultural and aesthetic program.<sup>20</sup>

*Fjeldeventyret* became a regular part of the repertoire at the Christiania Theater, with productions appearing in 1850, 1865, and frequently throughout the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>21</sup> It was performed on the Norwegian national day no fewer than four times during these two decades. According to Øyvind Anker, “Det var Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson som i 1865 med sin instudering av *Fjeldeventyret* på Christiania Theater brøt med tradisjonen fra Bjerregaards egen instruksjon og gav stykket et mer realistisk preg”.<sup>22</sup> This makes sense given Bjørnson’s efforts starting around the same time to create a more realistic theatrical expression for his bourgeois marriage dramas. However, this attempt at adapting the piece to the modern mode of realism did not prevail, and *Fjeldeventyret* remained firmly within the realm of the national romantic in later productions.

In addition to Bjerregaard’s conscious effort to translate the rural landscape into a set of nationally inflected markers, the text also contains a quite literal problem of translation, in the figure of the dairymaid Aagot. Aagot speaks and sings in Gudbrandsdal dialect, which Bjerregaard attempted to transliterate. Bjerregaard provided translations from dialect to Danish in footnotes for each of her lines. We see the first example of this in scene five of the first act when Aagot is introduced. The verse “Snart eg æ naa klar i Qvel, / Saa gaar eg te Qvile, / Sølv saa roleg onde Fell / Test i Maargaa tile, / Nær eg da ha somna in, / Drømer eg om Guten min”<sup>23</sup> becomes “Snart mit Dagværk fuldbragt er, / Rolig da jeg hviler / Til paa Fjeldets Tinde her / Morgenrøde smiler. / Drømmen mig skal vise froe / Billed af min Ven saa troe”.<sup>24</sup> These translations probably appear unnecessary and

perhaps unintentionally comical to modern readers, yet *Fjeldeventyret* is referenced repeatedly as a groundbreaking text in the development of a *nynorsk* literary tradition, which suggests just how great the cultural gap between rural dialects and Christiania-based Danish was in the 1820s.

Ivar Aasen considered *Fjeldeventyret* to be important enough that he translated two of the peasant roles from Danish to *Landsmaal* in 1853 for a performance at Kristiania Norske Theater.<sup>25</sup> Aasen owned a copy of the play and saw it performed in Trondheim in 1846 and in Christiania in 1850.<sup>26</sup> Walton argues that *Fjeldeventyret* along with Riis' *Til Seters* and Wergeland's *Fjeldstuen* served as the models for Aasen's own attempt in the dramatic genre, *Ervingen* from 1855: "Dei leverte eit miljø, eit teaterspråk og typesituasjonar. Dei skaffa til veges både visuelle og verbale klisjéar, og dei viste Aasen kor gledespunktet til teaterpublikumet låg".<sup>27</sup> Again according to Walton, by excluding the dominant civil servant class from his drama, Aasen unsuccessfully hoped to rescue peasant characters from their purely comedic roles and present them on their own terms and in their own language on the urban stage.<sup>28</sup>

This problem of translating and mediating Norwegian oral language for a Norwegian audience came to a head with Arne Garborg's posthumously published 1925 centennial translation of *Fjeldeventyret* from Danish to *nynorsk*. The translation does not include Wergeland's epilog. Hulda Garborg's brief introduction, which is dated December 1924 nearly a year after Arne Garborg's death, gives only background information about the play and Bjerregaard's life. Productions of this translation appeared at Det Norske Teatret in 1928, 1941, and 1947 as part of a consciously nationalistic program. Garborg normalized all the roles to *nynorsk*, with the exception of the dairy maid, Aagot, who maintained her Gudbrandsdal dialect. Even the three students from Christiania speak *nynorsk*. Olav Dalgard comments: "[...] dette eldste norske syngjespelet tente mykje på å koma i heil norsk målbunad, endå om nok mange sakna det løglege knotet til lensmann Østmo [sic], og meinte at språkmotsetnaden burde kome meir fram".<sup>29</sup> It is unclear precisely how the play benefited from this translation, as the structural and dramatic weaknesses of the original are maintained, and, as Dalgard suggests, the important linguistic differences between social groups are erased. This ultra-nationalist translation of the text appears to have been the end of the line for the cultural significance of *Fjeldeventyret*, and it is important to remember that it is the late, culturally conservative Garborg rather than the young radical Garborg who engaged with the text.

As a coda to this overview of the literary fate and framing of Bjerregaard's *Fjeldeventyret*, it should be noted in passing that the musical drama has lived on in adaptations to other media as well. Kirsten Flagstad's early twentieth-century performance of the aria "Aagots Fjeldsang" makes occasional appearances in collections of classical Norwegian songs, and the play was adapted to the cinema by director Leif Sinding in a 1927 silent film. Sinding's film, which was part of a movement of early twentieth-century Norwegian films that popularized and documented rural culture, fixed the visual metaphors for nationalist rural versus cosmopolitan urban culture for a new generation and a new medium in the second phase of nation-building, which took place after independence from Sweden in 1905.<sup>30</sup> The play was further adapted for a 1972 NRK television production.<sup>31</sup> But even these media adaptations of the text remained culturally conservative rather than progressive. Although much of the national symbolism that Bjerregaard launched in *Fjeldeventyret* continued to resonate in popular culture even today, the text itself has not exercised a strong appeal for late modern audiences, and Bjerregaard has not had the same kind of revival that other nineteenth-century writers have enjoyed in recent years. Yet perhaps in these times of growing awareness of both national and post-national identities, Bjerregaard's explicitly national drama merits reconsideration. Understood alongside other dramas informed by National Romantic ideals such as Wergeland's *Fjeldstuen*, Riis' *Til Seters* and Aasen's *Ervingen*—and perhaps even more importantly in relation to Ibsen's parody of National Romanticism, *Peer Gynt*—*Fjeldeventyret* has the potential to teach us a great deal about the origins and development of received tropes, and indeed about the function of so called "national drama" itself within the Norwegian context.

#### Noter

<sup>1</sup> Knut Nygaard, *Henrik Anker Bjerregaard. Dikteren og hans tid*, Oslo 1966, p.80. Nygaard appears to overlook Edvard Storm's *Døleviser* from the 1770s here.

<sup>2</sup> Karoline Daugstad makes a similar point: "Et interessant poeng her er at disse tre besøkende representerte de som etter hvert skulle vise seg å ha sterke interesser i seterlandskapet: Botanikere, malere og etnologer". Karoline Daugstad, *Mellom romantikk og realisme: Om seterlandskapet som ideal og realitet*. Trondheim 2000, p. 180.

<sup>3</sup> Henrik Anker Bjerregaard, *Fjeldeventyret. Syngespil i to akter*, Oslo 1949, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Bjerregaard 1949, p. 28.

- <sup>5</sup> Bjerregaard 1949, p. 28.
- <sup>6</sup> See my “The *Seter* as *Locus Amoenus* in Edvard Storm’s *Døleviser*”, in *Scandinavica* 2010:2, pp. 5–22
- <sup>7</sup> Nicolai Ramm Østgaard, *En Fjeldbygd. Billeder fra Østerdalen*. Christiania 1852, p. iv.
- <sup>8</sup> Nygaard 1966, p. 98, italics original.
- <sup>9</sup> Stephen J. Walton, *Ivar Aasens kropp*, Oslo 1996, p. 253.
- <sup>10</sup> Einar Høigård, *Henrik Anker Bjerregaard*, Oslo 1934, p. 59.
- <sup>11</sup> Nygaard 1966, pp. 168–169.
- <sup>12</sup> Henrik Wergeland, “Etterspil til Fjeldeventyret opført om Vaaren 1844 på Det dramatiske Theater i Christiania”, in *Fjeldeventyret. Syngespil i to akter*. Oslo 1949, p. 119.
- <sup>13</sup> Wergeland 1949, p. 120.
- <sup>14</sup> Theodor Caspari, *Norsk naturfølelse i det nittende aarhundrede*, Kristiania 1917, p. 30.
- <sup>15</sup> Daugstad 2000, p. 181; See also Francis Bull, “Seterliv i norsk diktning,” in *Den norske turistforeningens årbok 1956*. Oslo 1956, p. 42.
- <sup>16</sup> Wergeland was not acknowledged as the author of the epilog in Ibsen’s production.
- <sup>17</sup> Henrik Ibsen, “Prolog ved Fjeldeventyrets første Opførelse paa Christiania norske Theater”, in *Illustreret Nyhedsblad 1857*: 38, p. 191.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibsen 1857, p. 191.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibsen 1857, p. 191.
- <sup>20</sup> Gudleiv Bø, “*Nationale Subjekter*”: *Ideer om nasjonalitet i Henrik Ibsens romantiske forfatterskap*, Oslo 2000, pp. 31 and 49. Bø also relies on Ibsen’s 1859 application for a grant from the Norwegian parliament as evidence for his intellectual engagement with National Romanticism. See Bø 2000, pp. 48–49.
- <sup>21</sup> Øyvind Anker, *Christiania Theater’s [sic] repertoire 1827–1899*, Oslo 1956, p. 35.
- <sup>22</sup> Øyvind Anker, “Opplysninger”, in *Fjeldeventyret. Syngespil i to akter*. Oslo 1949, p. 121.
- <sup>23</sup> Bjerregaard 1949, p. 26.
- <sup>24</sup> Bjerregaard 1949, p. 27, footnote.
- <sup>25</sup> A translation of some of the roles in Holberg’s *Jeppe paa Bierget* followed in 1855.
- <sup>26</sup> Walton 1996, p. 635.
- <sup>27</sup> Walton 1996, p. 635.
- <sup>28</sup> Walton 1996, p. 641.
- <sup>29</sup> Olav Dalgard, “Framsyingane 1913–1942”, in *Det norske teatret femti år 1913–1963*, Ed. Nils Sletbak, Oslo 1963, p. 130.

<sup>30</sup> See Anne Marit Myrstad, *Melodrama, kjønn og nasjon: en studie av norske bygdefilmer 1920–1930*. Trondheim 1996, pp. 160–161.

<sup>31</sup> Jo Ørjasæter, *Fjernsynsteatret: til glede og forargelse*, Oslo, 1994, p. 279.