

# **The Jutland Heath as a Literary Place of Inheritance: Hans Christian Andersen, St. St. Blicher, Jeppe Aakjær**

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## **Abstract**

For centuries, the Jutland peninsula in Denmark was covered by heathland. From the end of the eighteenth century, the heath and its few residents were described to the middle classes in Copenhagen as 'Denmark's wilderness'. The heath was considered a picturesque contrast to the cities. This intensified as industrialisation gained a foothold in Copenhagen, Odense etc. Artists, genre painters and authors created the picture of an authentic and strange wilderness with immense wilds, strange inhabitants and magnificent nature. During the nineteenth century, writers like Hans Christian Andersen and Steen Steensen Blicher created the picture of the heath as an exotic, wonderful and wild place. Thus these artists created a literary place of inheritance, a special landscape that was considered by the Danes to mirror the soul of the people. From the mid nineteenth century, the effective farming started cultivating the heath and from 1870, this was intensified by the Society for Heathland Reclamation. Consequently the image of the heath as an authentic and inalienable place crystallised, precisely because it was being lost. A number of poets and artists, for example Jeppe Aakjær, sided with the heath. They defended the remaining parts of the heath and made it what it is today. This article examines a number of texts that were central to the construction of the heath as literary place of inheritance.

## **Keywords**

Hans Christian Andersen, Steen Steensen Blicher, Jeppe Aakjær, The heath as a place, Literary heritage, Staging of landscape, Storytelling and memory.

Jeg er født paa Jyllands Sletter,  
der hvor Lam af Lyngen nipper,  
der hvor hvergarnsklædt og liden  
Moder tørred sine Stripper.

(I come from the plains of Jutland,  
there where young lambs nibble heather,  
there where mother, small and twill-clad,  
dried her piggins in fine weather.)

(Jeppe Aakjær: 'I come from the plains of Jutland', 1901, and  
an inscription on the Fjends herred shire-stone at Kongenshus  
Mindepark)<sup>1</sup>

## Tourism in Literary Landscapes

Martin A. Hansen's novel *Løgneren* (The Liar), which appeared for the first time in 1950, is organised artistically and narratively as a diary in which the main character – a middle-aged, male school teacher – is forced by circumstances in his life and in nature to take some sort of stock of his existence, his emotions and his choices. The main character and diarist, Johannes Vig, lives on an island which is ice-bound for forty days. He is in love with the younger Annemari, but unable to open up about his feelings or acknowledge them. There is too much that binds and locks him in, so he chooses instead the observer's role and a cynical, ironic distance rather than to throw himself out into life. The novel captivated many Danish readers in the decade after its publication, partly because it contains a strong ethical theme and is a weighty artistic contribution to the discussions then taking place about human and existential responsibility.

The novel, through its organisation, depicts the relation between the truth of fiction and the fictionalisation of truth. Johannes Vig, as mentioned, is incapable of opening up and telling the truth either to himself or other fellow human beings close to him, but in the fiction, in the diary, he is able to draw near to a deeper truth. Here, the name of the island where the action takes place is Sandø or Sand Island. Martin

A. Hansen, however, makes use of an actual landscape in his novel, one that is easily identifiable as that of Stevns, which is a peninsula that juts out from the southeast corner of Sealand. This is where Hansen (1909-1955) grew up, and it is the setting for several of his works, and often named as such. Here, however, in the fiction of the novel Stevns becomes Sandø.

It lies outside our present scope to discuss in detail this narrative technique, but it is obvious that the author creates for himself a space for fictionalisation and thereby the possibility to create meaning by, on the one hand, giving the fiction an existence by allowing it to unfold in an actual landscape with which the author is very familiar, and, on the other hand, by fictionalising this actual landscape, turning it into the special scene of the action in the novel. Hansen creates a tension between what can be recognised in the 'real' world of objects and landscapes and that which is placed in the fictional space. He interprets the landscape in a duality of memory and poetic imagination, so that both of them – memory and free imagination – become elements in an imaginative play on place. The American cultural geographer and place philosopher Edward S. Casey addresses this issue when he characterises 'the place' as the momentum for human consciousness, where memory, feeling, security and mood are transmuted into a phenomenological reality that is neither the place in a topographical-geographical sense nor pure fantasy and idea, but a third entity that is charged with tension. The place, according to Casey (2009), is like a desire to hold onto the object and space of memory which cannot be attained in real reality. The place or the places, Casey says, function as topoi in the human consciousness where self-recognition is created in a tension between the actual and the imagination.

My short preface on Martin A. Hansen's novel and his fictive island landscape has been included here because I wanted to place a ring round certain characteristics which I feel are crucially important in literary heritage tourism. Literary heritage tourists are a reading public fascinated by an artist's ability to capture a perceived reality. That is why they set out into the landscape to see and experience places that can either be linked to the life and self-staging of a given writer or which are purely fictive stagings of characters or environments that

otherwise 'only' exist in a novel or a film. When tourists visit Odense in large numbers to walk in the footsteps of Hans Christian Andersen and to visit a museum where a range of, from a historical point of view, authentic objects have been arranged in an exhibition, it is not the objects or the footsteps in themselves that are interesting but the ability of the objects and the landscapes to tell a magical story that could be true. So there is no great difference between visiting an environment where a writer has once lived and moved and visiting a place where fictive characters have led their staged lives. 'The Museum' above Sherlock Holmes' house at 219B Baker Street is a good example of the latter. The relation between the narrator's time and the time of what is narrated, between the narrator's 'now' and the narrated 'then', is a narratological engine that is probably always present in fiction. In principle, it is the same force that is in motion in the desire for place in the heritage tourist.

Literary heritage tourism is not a new phenomenon. Many years have passed since Iceland started to call itself 'The Island of Sagas', just as visitors have flocked for over two hundred years to places and traces of Shakespeare at Stratford-Upon-Avon. It is not new, but the literary heritage phenomenon is at present among the most rapidly expanding forms of tourism. There are stories that want to be told, but there are to an even greater extent stories that want to be heard and experienced. My article deals with the Jutland Heath as fertile soil for a literary heritage tourism that arose about two hundred years ago and that continued to thrive undiminished whereas the heath, physically speaking, has virtually ceased to exist.

## **Walks on the Jutland Heath**

The Jutland Heath was created by writers. It was writers such as Steen Steensen Blicher, Meir Goldschmidt, Hans Christian Andersen, Jeppe Aakjær and Johannes V. Jensen who, in their portrayals, gave the heath a voice, images and a form that made it accessible as a place of experience for their own and future ages.<sup>2</sup> In doing so, they created a place of inheritance – a dynamic, live place of experience that we can possess for ever and refer to, precisely as part of our cultural

inheritance. Today, the heather-clad heath of Jutland exists only in small clumps that have been left behind in a productive landscape that is mainly the province of agriculture. It is places like Rebild Bakker and Kongenshus Mindepark that still remain. They are small in size but great in importance, for they pass on the inheritance of what once was. They tell and retain history.

The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers already named, along with others, portrayed in their art the heather-clad heath as a place that had special values, and that thus became a really special place of wide expanses, beauty and – perhaps most of all – wildness. The Heath (as opposed to heath) was depicted in their art as a place, a topography, that was and is characterised by authenticity.

The writers depicted the countryside, displayed its aesthetic distinctiveness and described the native inhabitants and groups of people whose lives and destinies were linked to the heather and the poverty-stricken farming that could be practised out in ‘the wilderness’. They made the Heath a literary place of inheritance. A whole host of painters also immortalised the Heath, its inhabitants and its various environments. They were co-creators, and significant in what Steen Bo Frandsen has described in his major work *Opdagelsen af Jylland* (The Discovery of Jutland, Frandsen 1996) as voyages of exploration out into regions of the Danish kingdom of whose existence no one in Eastern Denmark – or in Holstein for that matter – had much of an inkling. The writers and painters turned the Heath, the heather-clad heath, the wide expanses of moorland, into a strange land tinged with the exotic. They subsequently created an image of loss, when the heathland areas were seriously threatened by farming that sought to reclaim land for cultivation. It is such things as exoticism and the experience of loss that create mythical places. And a literary place of inheritance is basically a mythical construction.<sup>3</sup>

Steen Bo Frandsen, in the work already mentioned, calls the writers explorers. They are the ‘Livingstones’ of their time – they set out into the dark undiscovered regions of Jutland, into ‘the desert’ as the Heath is often called, and, like anthropologists, describe the special nature and culture they meet as they go. To be able to do this, they have to alienate it, so that it becomes interesting and dramatic. In short,

it has to become literary. Steen Steensen Blicher has a great number of excellent descriptions of distinctive human characteristics in the landscape of the Heath. Here it is the turn of the Agger area in Thy:

Dersom en Kjøbenhavnerv, der aldrig havde været udenfor Gefions Æ, pludselig, ved et Luftskeib eller et Dampskeib, blev flyttet til Agger: saa Beboernes fremmede Dragter og fremmede Ansigter, og hørte deres ham ganske fremmede Tungemaal – man kunde maaskee indbilde ham, at han var kommet til et ganske fremmed Land. Og dette var endda ikke saa sært, eftersom selv deres Naboer i Thy ansee dem for noget meer end halvfremmede, og noget mindre end halvvilde.

(Blicher 2013: 44)

(If a person from Copenhagen who had never been outside Gefion's Island were suddenly transported – by airship or steamer – to Agger and were to see the strange costumes and strange faces of the local inhabitants, and hear what to him was quite a foreign tongue, it would perhaps be possible to convince him that he had arrived in a completely foreign country. And that would not be all that strange, since even their neighbours in Thy regard them as being a little more than half-foreign and a little less than half-wild.)

In his poems, novellas and topographical portrayals, Blicher created a foreign country with its own nature and its own people. In this exotic 'otherness' the growing bourgeoisie from the towns could reflect themselves and their own cultivated existence. In addition, Blicher among others created a physical and existential space for a special reflection and experiencing, i.e. a very special place for self-immersion and humanity. His introduction to 'The Hosier and his Daughter' from 1829 contains this place:

Stundom, naar jeg har vandret ret ude i den store Alhede, hvor jeg kun har havt den brune Lyng omkring mig og den blaae Himmel over mig; naar jeg vankede fjernt fra Menneskene og

Mindemærkerne om deres Puslen herved, der i Grunden kun er Muldvarpeskud, som Tiden eller an Anden urolig Tamerlan engang jevner med Jorden; naar jeg svævede hjertelet, frihedsstolt som Beduinen, hvem intet Huus, ingen snævert begrænset Mark fængsler i Pletten, men som ejer, besidder Alt hvad han seer.

(Blicher 1991: 110)

(At times, when I have walked out onto the great Heath, when all I have only had the brown heather around me and the blue sky above, when I have roamed far from humanity and the monuments to their pottering around down here, which is basically no more than a mole-hill that Time or some other restless Tamerlane will at some point flatten to the ground, when I floated light of heart, proud and free as a Bedouin, one who no house, no narrowly defined field imprisons on the spot, but who owns, possesses everything that he sees.)

Blicher allows himself as an observer to meet eternity, experience the dream of eternity, and in a magnificent description expresses the feeling of a boundless existence. It is this 'otherness' that forms the basis for the heather-clad heath as a place of inheritance: the exotic 'other' and the alternative to the shackles of civilisation.

Today, as mentioned, there are only insignificant clumps left of the heather-clad heath which, far into the nineteenth century, covered vast areas and which had developed as a distinct community of flora and a distinct biotope based on poor, mainly West Jutland sandy soil over a number of centuries. The modern, action-oriented agriculture that developed in Denmark in the last decades of the nineteenth century started to cultivate the Heath. This trend was spearheaded by Hedeselskabet – the Society for Heathland Reclamation – which was established in 1866 in order to transform the 'useless' heathland into good farming land. The cultivators of the Heath and the cooperative movement created a new story about the new age and about triumphing over what was 'useless'. For the cooperative farmers, the heath stood for disorder and uselessness. The opposite of this story is created by

a new generation of writers around 1900, who see the heather-clad heath as the last bastion of what we came from and the story behind it, and as a final refuge for human reflection in the space of nature.

In the following – in small splash-downs, small studies – I will show how the heath was managed and still is managed by literature. I will show how the Heath is established and maintained as a literary place of inheritance.

## **Hans Christian Andersen on the Heath**

In the summer of 1859, Hans Christian Andersen was travelling around Jutland. From 28 August up to and including 3 September he stopped off, on his way from Randers to Viborg, at Hjermind vicarage and stayed with the Swane family – a few kilometres north-east of where the town of Bjerringbro later came into existence. Also staying with the Swane family at the time was the ninety-year-old high-ranking clergyman Bjerregaard, who in his youth had been a friend of Jonas Collin, who meant so much to Andersen. Andersen, with his usual sympathetic insight, writes in his diary about the place and his stay. The weather was good, Andersen was on his travels, he was full of new experiences, he was given a comfortable room, was able to take pleasure in the joy that his reading aloud gave the Swane family, including ‘little Henrik’, who loved stories. Despite this, a fear of boils, ringworm, fever and cholera cast great shadows over the account in the diary. His stomach is causing him frightful problems because it is ‘loose’, and Andersen registers that a case of cholera has broken out in Horsens, so he feels convinced that he has been infected with the disease. On Friday, 2 September, Andersen notes that ‘The weather is fine, the state of my stomach already, it would seem, more firm. I dare not pray in my anxiety – for that will not change God’s will in any way’ (Andersen 2004: 362-363).

On his way to Hjermind, in the mail coach from Randers, Andersen had written a poem which he made a fair copy of and read out at the vicarage. It was ‘Jutland’, later published in the magazine *Illustreret Tidende* in 1860 and in the collection *Kjendte og glemte Digte* (Known and Forgotten Poems, 1867). The poem was set to music by the



composer P. Heise in 1860, since when it has been a striking hymn with a greeting to the Jutland continent. There is hardly a popular platform, a church hall or an association in Jutland where 'Jutland Bounded by Two Oceans' is not sung. Sometimes it takes a person from Funen to portray Jutlanders – and vice versa, as we well know! The poem describes the sheer vastness of the heath landscape, '[t]he heath of solemn greatness', depicting it as a place when 'the desert mirages live' and where 'Loki drives his herds' (Andersen 2004: 320-321). The Heath is colossal and superior to man, Andersen states, but he also demonstrates that he is well aware that this is a place that will soon be transformed. For 'soon the steam-dragon will be flying' and 'the British fly across the sea'. Andersen is a tourist and a travelling observer who is able to portray places and landscapes, to uncover their beauty and aesthetic distinctiveness as almost no other, but he is also amazingly able to discount in advance the changes he knew, or sensed, would come – changes with which he was fascinated but about which he had his misgivings. His seismographic awareness of the fantasy of the place, the Heath as material and the character of the Heath are retained as an inheritance that not only survived the cultivation of the Heath but still creates powerful images here in the twenty-first century. The desert mirage is not thin air. And the Jutland Heath, incidentally, is present in many other works by Andersen. In the novel *O.T.* from 1836 the Jutland Heath appears as a scene for dark forces, shadows, that often anticipate dystopian events in the life of the main character, Otto Thostrup, when he thinks about actual journeys across the Heath to get to his home area near Lemvig.

When Hans Christian Andersen visited and travelled the heath, he was not without prior knowledge of it. Andersen read and admired Blicher, so he travelled, so to speak, in the image that Blicher had created in literature of the heath as well as exploring it for himself (see Olwig 1984). This literary conversation between Blicher and Andersen is just one example of how places of literary heritage are sometimes formed via fruitful cross-pollination between works and between authors.

The Heath, then, is a physical, literary place of inheritance that weaves its way into the literary conversation that Anne-Marie Mai's

portrayals of vicarages and landscapes conduct in *Hvor litteraturen finder sted. Længslens tidsaldre 1800-1900* (Where Literature Takes Place. The Ages of Longing 1800-1900, Mai 2010). The Heath is the Jutlanders' special place, perhaps *the* very Jutland topos, the basic symbol of the idea of 'Exploring Jutland' that is depicted and presented in, among other works, Steen Bo Frandsen's previously-mentioned thesis *Opdagelsen af Jylland* (Frandsen 1996, Olwig 1996). Steen Steensen Blicher repeatedly portrayed the Heath, perhaps most beautifully in the poem 'Homesickness', with the lines: 'Kære est du fødeland, sødt dit navn // Til dig star dine sønners stærke længsel' (Dear are you, land of our birth, sweet is your name, to you do your sons greatly yearn) from 1814. In the nineteenth century, and along with Hans Christian Andersen, he helped create the Jutlanders' 'place' and thereby contributed to a Jutland 'nation-building', as depicted in the section 'a new geography' in Anne-Marie Mai's *Hvor litteraturen finder sted* (Mai 2010: 196). A new poetical story of the Heath, however, was written around 1900, one which partly continued the picture painted by Andersen and Blicher, and partly went on its own way in portraying a threatened biotope. It is in that movement that the Heath is changed from physical nature to 'desert mirage', that is, to an eternal literary place of inheritance.

## Jutland in America

In 1911, the wealthy Danish-American Max Henius (1859-1935) – who happened to be born in the same year that Andersen wrote 'Jutland' – took the initiative of collecting money from Danish Americans throughout the USA in order to purchase almost 200 acres of rolling heathland countryside in Rebild Bakker. The aim was to turn the hillsides into a conservation area and to hold an annual rally to mark Danish-American connections and revive memories for the many thousands of Danes who had emigrated to America. Max Henius, who was a chemist and who grew up in Aalborg as the son of Isidor Henius, the founder of *De danske Spritfabrikker* (The Danish Distillers), omitted to mention to the local farmers and plot owners what the piece of heathland was to be used for. The local, modern farmers wanted to see efficiency

and the cultivation of the Heath! Not conservation! Henius' agents got the local people to believe that the buyers came from Hedeselskabet, which wanted to plant the inactive, heather-clad slopes with sensible species of trees such as common spruce and white spruce. Henius and a group of partners, including the local forest supervisor Ejner Svendsen, from Rold, had other plans. They wanted to conserve what they viewed as a piece of Ancient Denmark. Henius and his circle saw that the heath had almost disappeared under the greedy ploughshare and they regarded the heather-clad heath as being a special, ancient Danish type of countryside. Lastly, he felt that the Heath had a special value as a commemorative place for many Danish-Americans, because they often had their origins precisely in the heathland regions of Jutland. The official opening of Rebild National Park was to have taken place on 4 July 1912, but because of the death of King Frederik VIII, the celebrations were postponed until 5 August, when they were personally attended by Christian X and Queen Alexandrine.

### **A Spot with a Vale and Clusters of Reed**

One of Max Henius' close friends, the opera singer Johannes Fønss (1884-1964) mentions in his book *Bagom breve, billeder – og begivenheder* (Behind Letters, Photos – and Events, Fønss 1962) the events he also had been involved in concerning the conservation of Rebild Bakker and the first celebrations. He mentions that Jeppe Aakjær was Max Henius' absolutely favourite author, followed by Thøger Larsen (1875-1928) and Johan Skjoldborg (1861-1936), and that this same Henius always connected the house in Rebild Bakker that he had built as 'his place' with this stanza from the poem 'Jutland' by Jeppe Aakjær:

Hvad var vel i Verden det fattige Liv  
med al dets fortærende Tant,  
om ikke en Plet med en Dal og lidt Siv  
vort Hjerter i Skælvinger bandt!  
Om ikke vi drog fra det yderste Hav  
for bøjet og rynket at staa  
og høre de Kluk,

de mindernes Suk  
fra Bækken, vi kyssed som smaa!  
(Jeppe Aakjær, from 'Jylland', 1901)

(What in the whole world were this poor life indeed  
consumed by its poor, empty show  
if a spot with a vale and clusters of reed  
our hearts did not make quiver so!  
If we did not come o'er the far-distant sea,  
stand wrinkled and no longer tall  
and hear songs slide by,  
each memory's sigh,  
in streams that we once kissed when small!)

Henius shared Aakjær's attitudes and made his words and moods his own. The Heath, the Jutland Heath, had acquired a symbolic force that Andersen pointed out as early as 1859, just as Steen Steensen Blicher had portrayed the Heath as the soul's special landscape. Now around 1900 the Heath was no longer a place for romantic roaming in the mind; it was quite physically threatened as a biotope and as a place of memory. Furthermore, the modern age, the industrial age that was now developing, the homestead of a new view of the land that was being lost. For a number of artists and intellectuals, the Heath was a place that thematised the lost land. Just as the Danish-American Henius purchased and conserved Rebild Bakker, so did the industrialist and art patron Mads Rasmussen buy up and guarantee a large area of Svanninge Bakker near Faaborg in 1910 – an area that was also originally heathland with clusters of trees, already known from the pictures of the Funen painter Fritz Syberg in particular, especially his work *Aftenleg i Svanninge Bakker* (Evening Games in Svanninge Hills, 1900). Syberg's choice of motif and image subsequently led directly to Svanninge Bakker being declared a conservation area. In this way, artists such as Jeppe Aakjær and Fritz Syberg introduced artistic dialogue that inspired the conservation of specific landscapes.

At the first Rebild celebration, held in the hills near Rold on 5 August

1912, Johannes Fønss declaimed Aakjær's poem 'Kornmod' (Summer Lightning). In addition, Jeppe Aakjær had been asked to write a cantata for the occasion, and among other things he created these stanzas:

Stille, Hjerte, Sol gaar ned,  
Sol gaar ned paa Heden,  
Dyr gaar hjem fra dagens Béd,  
Storken staar i Reden.  
Stille, Hjerte, Sol gaar ned.

Tavshed over Hedesti,  
og langs Veje krumme.  
En forsinket Humlebi  
ene høres brumme.  
Stille, Hjerte, Sol gaar ned.

Viben slaar et enligt Slag  
over Mosedammen,  
før den under Frytlens Tag  
folder Vingen sammen.  
Stille, Hjerte, Sol gaar ned.

Fjerne Ruder østerpaa  
blusser op i Gløden,  
Hededamme bittesmaa  
spejler Aftenrøden.  
Stille, Hjerte, Sol gaar ned!  
(Jeppe Aakjær, from Ræbild-kantate, 1912)

(Still, my heart, now sets the sun,  
While the heath is resting,  
Herds now homeward are begun,  
And the stork is nesting.  
Still, my heart, now sets the sun.

O'er the heath-path silence falls  
As on roads so winding.  
A late bumblebee is all  
Keenest ears are finding.  
Still, my heart, now sets the sun.

Briefly now the lapwing flies  
O'er the bog-pond's blushes,  
Ere it folds its wings and lies  
'Neath a roof of rushes.  
Still, my heart, now sets the sun.

Eastern window-panes afar  
Flare up in the gloaming,  
Heathland ponds like tiny stars  
Catch the sunset's homing.  
Still, my heart, now sets the sun!)

What is particularly beautiful about Aakjær's evening song is the respect he displays for nature, which does not appear as a symbol of anything else than itself – as physical, natural scientific heathland, where poetry arises out of the vast stillness that reigns when the sun sets. The only movement or 'interruption' that takes place is the late bumblebee that hums away in the great, silent space. Humanity is present, but only through faint traces, such as the window panes to the east, in this great moment of nature, where day meets night's embrace. It is the moment, the great stillness, that holds the observing I-figure: 'Still, my heart, now sets the sun'.

### **Nature is Both Mighty and Frail**

The poem reveals not only Jeppe Aakjær's great ability to portray the vastness of nature but also the attitudes towards and views of nature that were strong at the turn of the twentieth century. They express, in the truest sense of the word, a duality. On the one hand,

Aakjær's depiction is typified by a deep respect for this heathland, this landscape and this nature that is so much greater and mightier than the individual human being, who humbly has to kneel in reverence. On the other hand, the depiction is also typified by the insight into this same nature's vulnerability and transitoriness. So Jeppe Aakjær is actually depicting an outer nature that at one and the same time is both mighty and frail, and this is a double attitude also found in most of the artists involved in the Popular Breakthrough around 1900.

Many of the poets and writers known as the Limfjord writers and part of the Popular Breakthrough were deeply engaged in the fight to conserve the biotopes and natural landscapes which they saw rapidly disappearing. Jeppe Aakjær, for example, writes in an article in the newspaper *Politiken* on 11 December 1909 about the Danish landscape as a delicate and frail beauty that needs protection:

I Norge og Sverrig, i Østrig og Frankrig, i England som Nordamerika – overalt er Sindene nu vendte imod det samme: at beskytte den uberørte Natur mod Kulturbestræbelsernes altudjævnende Nivelleringslyster.

Faa Lande i Verden trænger som Danmark til en saadan Beskyttelse. Vort Land er formet af saa blødt et Stof, at dets sarte Skjønhed let faar en dødelig Rift. En enkelt Arbejdskolonne og en Gravemaskine kan i nogle Uger forvandle en Egns Fysiognomi. Danmark har kun sine grønne Skrænter at byde frem mod Stormen og den skurende Regn. Ingen trodsig Fjældknaus, ingen skjærmende Bjærgkjæder staar Vagt om Sletten. (Jeppe Aakjær: 'Nature Conservancy', *Politiken*, 11 December 1909. Cited here from *Samlede Værker: Artikler og Taler*, IV, 1919)

(In Norway and Sweden, in Austria and France, in Britain as in North America – everywhere minds are moving in the same direction: to protect unspoilt nature against the efforts of culture to level everything out.

Few countries in the world are in more need of such protection than Denmark. Our land is made of so soft a material that

its delicate beauty can easily sustain a fatal scratch. A single workforce and an excavator can, in the space of a few weeks, transform the physiognomy of a region. Denmark only has its green slopes to offer in protection against the storm and scouring rain. No defiant crags of rock, no protective mountain chains stand guarding the plains.)

A revived, enterprising agriculture achieved great triumphs around the year 1900. Freeholders stood solidly planted on their plots of land like farmers of a new age that had put the power of an onerous tradition in its place by a political victory in the constitutional struggle against the Estrup government. Many of them had also been energised via what they had gained from the Folk High School movement where they had studied, along with professional knowledge from an agricultural college or a school of home economics. Several hundred dairies and other production units had sprung up in the landscape and, like the new cooperatives, village institutes, etc. they were collectively owned. A railway network had already been laid down through the countryside, with many more kilometres of track being added during these years, in which the towns also steamed in a potent wave of industrialisation. The onrush of development was land-consuming in a quite literal sense: thousands of hectares that had previously been bogland, heathland, commonland or under water were put to the plough, drained, marled, fertilised and cultivated. Danish agriculture turned new layers of soil in a forward surge, the like of which had never been seen before. (Frandsen 2009: 536)

## **Characters and Types**

Writers such as Jeppe Aakjær, Marie Bregendahl, Johannes V. Jensen, Johan Skjoldborg, Thøger Larsen and the so-called Limfjord writers had grown up in or close to this rural culture, which in Jutland in particular had taken a sudden leap from peasant culture to modern agriculture that used refined production methods. These artists felt themselves to be emigrants in time – they had grown up in one age, but as adult artists had moved into another one. Their art often had to do with this



life-journey, just as it was based on images of the experience linked to the departure from a local region and life-form to the conditions and opportunities of modern life. Against such a background, it is hardly strange that they were preoccupied with depicting places and landscapes or local eccentrics and character types, for here they found what was obviously artistic material as well as a number of personal experiences and existential conflicts that can find expression in an artistic form.

Johannes V. Jensen's *Himmerlandshistorier* (Himmerland Stories) from 1898, Jeppe Aakjær's *Vadmelsfolk* (The People of Vadmel), which appeared for the first time in 1900, and Marie Bregendahl's *Billeder af Sødalsfolkenes liv* (Pictures of the Lives of the People of Sødal) from 1914 all contain portrayals of individuals and characters who are characterised and contained by a particular landscape and a harsh nature in which they fight hard to survive and from which they struggle to free themselves, but which they find that they are part of and therefore cannot live without. In all three works, the family, the group, the species are described as being greater than the free choice of the individual, and should the individual even so reach out for happiness in love or for the good life, fate or destiny hits back immediately and reduces the individual to misery or madness. The individual is at the mercy of and shaped by the traditions and calling of the place.

The writers mentioned, however, also praise the modern, scientific principles, modern philosophy, politics and the path towards greater democratic equality in society – and very often especially inspiration coming from the international world outside. Their conception of modern society is not restricted by nostalgia. They are extremely modern, oriented towards progress and better welfare for those suffering social need or subject to other people's power, and for precisely that reason they maintain in their art their portrayals of what used to be. Jeppe Aakjær, Johan Skjoldborg, Marie Bregendahl and Johannes V. Jensen all saw in the harsh life and the character of the heathland farmers an inheritance that was to help ensure solidarity in modern Denmark, and in the vigour of the heath they saw a kind of natural root that had to be preserved in order to hold onto the memory of what underlay the present, its historical conditions. These

writers and their attitudes to existence and its circumstances help to create the utopias that were later formulated politically in demands for a welfare society (Frandsen 2009: 536).

## **The Apostles of Planting**

Writers such as Aakjær, Jensen, Bregendahl and Skjoldborg realised that an age and a form of life was on the point of disappearing, and that important values and forms would do so at the same time. They see and portray the gains and losses of a change from what they, with their own life-stories, are anchored in and shaped by. So the landscape is portrayed as a scene for recollection and as the great outdoor narrative that retains the possibilities of the past and future. They portrayed the hard work and toil as a condition for the heath's peasant farmers, and they had great respect for the struggle against nature by those who lived there. They saw modern agriculture, on the other hand, as being driven by an unbridled desire for profit, one in which all ideals concerning community and respect for the greatness of nature were overturned without any veneration of the preconditions and the generations of families that had given them such riches.

As far as Jeppe Aakjær was concerned, the activities of the Society for Heathland Reclamation were the epitome of cold-hearted greed and destruction, and he dubs its followers 'Apostles of Planting' and 'The Gentlemen Heatherscarers', also accusing them of being without any natural-historical knowledge and empathy:

Hedeselskabet er et Barn af Romantikken; ligesom Øhlenschläger vilde rejse Oldtidsaanden i det danske Folk, saadan gik Dalgas og fablede om at opelske Oldtidsskove paa den jydske Hede.

[...]

Den jydske Hede er blevet taget fra os gennem Overrumpling. Den vestjydske Mand er meget sjælden selv blevet spurgt om sine Ønsker. Og nu kjender han knap sit eget Land igjen. Det er en saare kjedsommelig Ting at mixe for meget med et Landskab, vi elsker. de Folk, der tilplantede Himmelbjærget, burde have haft livsvarigt Tugthus.

Nu frygter jeg for, de er blevet Etatsraader, og det er virkelig i Forhold til Forbrydelsen en altfor ringe Straf.  
(Aakjær 1918: 486-487)

(The Society for Heathland Reclamation is a child of Romanticism; just as Oehlenschläger wanted to raise the spirit of antiquity in the Danish people, Dalgas raved about raising the forests of antiquity on the Jutland Heath. [...])

The Jutland heath has been taken from us by surprise. The West Jutlander is very rarely asked about his own wishes. And now he can scarcely recognise his own land. It is an extremely tedious thing to fiddle too much with countryside we love. Those who have afforested Himmelbjerget ought to be jailed for life.

I now fear that they have become titular councillors of state – which is far too lenient a punishment for their crime.)

Later on in the same article Aakjær justifies his anger at the conduct of the Society for Heathland Reclamation – it is precisely because of their lack of understanding of the Jutland people, their temperament and life-form. He accuses the society of solely wishing to impose an 'Islander Ideal':

Det er ikke min hensigt at bryde Staven over al Hedeselskabets Virksomhed; det har gjort Ting, som fortjener nationens Tak. Men det har været en uhyre ensidig Bevægelse, og det har ikke røbet et Glimt af Forstaaelse af det Naturideal, der ligger dybest i Vestjydernes Sind. To Naturidealer mødes og strides i vort lille Land: det ene, Øbo-idealet, kommer Øst fra og kommer med Fordringer om Træer og Skygge; det er Bøgeskovens Sønner, der vil se Sjællands alle Vegne. det andet Naturideal (til hvilket jeg bekender mig) kommer Vest fra og forlanger først og fremmest Udsyn, elsker overalt de store Flader, Vindenes Tærskelo og de milehvelvede Horisonter. Begge Naturopfattelser er intimt og inderligt forbundet med Folkekaraktererne i Øst og Vest.  
(ibid. 488)

(It is not my intention to denounce everything the Society for Heathland Reclamation does – it has done things that are worthy of the nation's gratitude. But it has been a terribly one-sided movement, and it has not betrayed the slightest sign of any understanding of the nature ideal that lies deep in the heart of the West Jutlanders. Two nature ideals clash in our small country: one of them, the islander ideal, comes from the east and comes with the insistence on trees and shade – these are the sons of the beechwood, who want to see Sealand everywhere. The other nature ideal (to which I adhere to) comes from the west and first and foremost insists on the panoramic view, loves the large expanses everywhere, the threshing floor of the winds and the vast vault of the horizon. Both conceptions of nature are intimately and profoundly connected to the regional character of the east and west.)

Subsequently it is claimed that the Jutland Heath has created and given the Jutlander his 'hardened, knotted appearance, bushy eyebrows, his stubborn will, his feeling of loneliness, his humility towards God and Nature' (ibid. 489). A cultivating conquest of the Heath is thus an assault, a killing, a murder of the Jutlander and Jutland history. But it is also the annihilation of a biotope and of an aesthetical resource that can never be regenerated, which means that it is the Danes' historical recollections, the marrow of the tribe that is being broken and annihilated. That is why Jeppe Aakjær fights to preserve 'the mirage of the great desert', and quite deliberately and enthusiastically Aakjær quotes and refers to both Hans Christian Andersen and Blicher.

### **Kongenshus Mindepark**

Jeppe Aakjær and his poems were strongly involved in the conservation of Rebild Bakker. He also helped to ensure that the migrating dune of Raabjerg Mile near Kandestederne and Skagen, which the state had purchased in 1900, was declared a conservation area in such a way that it could continue to migrate slowly across the top of Jutland. He was

also active in securing the area now known as Kongenshus Mindepark, which was declared a conservation area in 1943 and opened as a memorial park in 1953.

This was very close to the area where the first attempts were made to cultivate the heath. It was the Mecklenburg officer Ludwig von Kahlen who first tried in 1754 to plough the land. With the support of Frederik V, he raised a house in the area – which is why it came to be called Kongenshus – but his attempt to cultivate the land was unsuccessful. Meanwhile, the king brought several hundred farmers from the south of Germany to the Heath so that they could have a try, and it is said that they introduced the potato to Denmark.<sup>4</sup> It lies outside our scope here to deal with the harsh life of the ‘Potato Germans’, but they have left their mark in some of the local place names – and the spread of the potato perhaps! In 1913, a rich merchant, Hans Dall, bought his place with a total of 1300 hectares of heathland at Kongenshus. With Johannes Bech, he started something as exotic as a reindeer farm that was even run by genuine Sámi families who lived in their characteristic tents. Most of the reindeer died of disease. Before that, however, Jeppe Aakjær had conducted a vehement verbal war against Hans Dall and Johannes Bech, who were the men behind the reindeer adventure. Aakjær struck hard against the initiative, which he felt was completely out of step with common sense and devoid of any respect for the natural and cultural history of the heath, and he lashed both of them verbally in, among other things, an article entitled *Fra Agermuld og Hedesand. Studier fra Hjemstavnen* (From Arable Soil and Heathland Sand. Studies from the Home Region), which appeared in 1930.

In this article, Jeppe Aakjær repeats and intensifies a number of the arguments he and his generation of Jutland poets and writers had to conserve and protect for the future large sections of the Heath and thereby the nature that constituted the great outdoor narrative of the west and central Jutlanders. It is the same great narrative with the mirages of the Heath that appears in Aakjær’s *Rugens Sange og andre Digte* (The Song of the Rye and other Poems) from 1906, which was written Sjørup, on the edge of the present-day Kongenshus Mindepark. In *The Song of the Rye* he depicts precisely this border area between the wild nature of the heather-clad heath and the fertile areas of cultivated

arable land as a poetical place.

Without Jeppe Aakjær and the struggle of the other artists to retain a piece of natural history, the nature of the Heath, all of Denmark would have been poorer as regards access to biotopes, landscapes and places that not so long ago were a condition for people's existence, and considerably poorer as regards areas of incredible natural beauty. That, at any rate, is what we Jutlanders feel! Jeppe Aakjær and his generation passed on images of the Heath with which they had been endowed by such great writers of the Romantic period as Hans Christian Andersen, Meir Goldschmidt and Blicher. The Romantics *saw* the Heath as a special place, while Aakjær and his generation helped to salvage scraps of it before it was completely transformed into 'a field of corn'.

Today the Jutland Heath is a symbol as well as a series of concrete locations that can be visited at Rebild Bakker and Kongenshus Mindepark, for example. Today they are a resource for a tourism that looks for cultural roots and existential wide open spaces. Blicher, Andersen and Aakjær fought for their age and their points of view. In doing so, they passed on a strong inheritance – poetical and historical – to our age. The Heath stands as a place of inheritance, not as a cornfield!

## **Places of Literary Heritage and Nature's Biotopes**

Tourism assumes many forms. It can appear to be extremely destructive as regards its own basis, but it can also appear to contribute to conserving actual cultural heritage or natural heritage and biotopes. When it comes to literary heritage tourism, it is obvious that a whole series of writers' homes, rooms and salons have been preserved because the artist was here and it was here his work came into existence. We are not, however, merely dealing with preserving historical scenery but with a continuation of a meaningful dialogue with cultural heritage. In her major three-volume work *Where Literature Takes Place*, which has already been mentioned, Anne-Marie Mai shows how literary places are not only historical starting points for a given work but that the experience of the places often transmit this meaning further. Mai writes a literary history which, by basing itself on a dialogue between

work and place, takes the reader deep into a particularly sensorial staging of history and space. Mai's place-based history of literature thus portrays a basis for further development of a literary heritage tourism for houses, manors, farms, salons, vicarages, editorial offices, etc. where literature took place. But this also applies to meadows, fields, pastureland, commonland, heaths, bogs and woodland.

In a large, interdisciplinary research project situated at University of Copenhagen on the possibilities of developing a dialogue-based planning of open land and its resources, researchers argue that precisely a tourism based on a history of consciousness – which is what literary heritage tourism is – can help to preserve and expand the Danish landscape as a multifunctional and also variegated landscape.<sup>5</sup> Modern knowledge tourism and heritage tourism can, if tackled the right way, greatly help to manage culture- and nature-historical values and contribute to the conservation of biotopes. The conserved small areas of the Jutland Heath are an example of this. Without Blicher, Andersen, Aakjær and Jensen the entire area would now be a cornfield. Mediation of the landscapes and places as historical narratives is the best possible way to defend diversity.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This article including literary texts has been translated by John Irons, who is responsible for a whole series of acknowledged translations from Danish to English of literary texts by such authors as Hans Christian Andersen, N.F.S. Grundtvig, Jeppe Aakjær and B.S. Ingemann.

<sup>2</sup> Parts of this article have, in another form and under other circumstances, been published in Danish in Maria Davidsen et al. (eds.) *Litteratur på stedet: En bog til Anne-Marie Mai*.

<sup>3</sup> A myth is a narrative which, so to speak, freezes an aura or a particular characteristic. That, at any rate, is how Roland Barthes defined the myth in his famous book *Mythologies* from 1966.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.kartoffelmuseum.dk/kartoflens\\_historie.htm](http://www.kartoffelmuseum.dk/kartoflens_historie.htm)

<sup>5</sup> L.S. Kristensen, Primdahl, Vejre (2016)

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