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

by

Johs. Nørregaard Frandsen

The Jutland Heath was, in a certain sense, created by Danish writers. It was writers such as Steen Steensen Blicher, Meir Goldschmidt, Hans Christian Andersen, Jeppe Aakjær, and Johannes V. Jensen who, in their literary depictions, gave the heath a voice, image, and form that made it accessible as a place of experience for their own and future ages. In doing so, they created a place of inheritance—a dynamic, living place of experience that we can possess forever and refer to 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, but a few places like Rebild Bakker and Kongenshus Mindepark still remain intact. They are small in size but great in importance, for they pass on the memory of what once was. They tell and retain history.

Along with others, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers mentioned above portrayed in their art the heather-clad heath as a place that had unique value and thus became a special place of wide expanses, beauty, and—perhaps most of all—wildness. The Heath (as opposed to the heath more generally) was depicted in their art as a place, a topography, that was and is characterized by authenticity. The writers depicted the countryside, displayed its aesthetic distinctiveness, and described the people whose lives and destinies were linked to the heather and the poverty-stricken farming that could be practiced out in “the wilderness.” They made the Heath into a literary inheritance. A whole host of painters also immortalized the Heath, its inhabitants, and its various environments. They were co-creators, instrumental in what Steen Bo Frandsen has described in his work *Opdagelsen af Jylland* (The Discovery of Jutland, 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 exotism and the experience of loss that create mythical places. A literary place of inheritance is basically a mythical construction.

Steen Bo Frandsen, in the abovementioned work, calls these writers explorers. They are the Livingstons 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. The author Steen Steensen Blicher offers a great number of excellent descriptions of distinctive human characteristics in the landscape of the Heath. Here is one depiction of the Agger area in Thy:

Dersom en Kjøbenhavnner, der aldrig havde været udenfor Gefions Æ, pludselig, ved et Luftskeib eller et Dampskib, blev flyttet til Agger: saae 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 neighbors 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 peoples. In this exotic otherness members of the urban bourgeoisie could reflect themselves and their own cultivated existence.

Blicher and others created a physical and existential space for reflection and experiencing, a very special place for self-immersion and humanity. His introduction to "The Hosier and his Daughter" from 1829 contains a description of such a 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 en 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 had was only 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 molehill 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 civilization.

Today, there are only insignificant clumps left of the heather-clad heath which, far into the nineteenth century, covered vast areas and hosted a distinct community of flora and a distinct biotope based on

poor, mainly West Jutlandic sandy soil. 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. A new generation of writers around 1900, who saw the heather-clad heath as the last bastion of what we came from, created the opposite of this story, defining it 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 and still is managed by literature, how it has been established and maintained as a literary place of inheritance.

Hans Christian Andersen on the Heath

In the summer of 1859, Hans Christian Andersen was traveling around Jutland. Between August 28 and September 3 he stopped off, on his way from Randers to Viborg, at Hjerminde vicarage and stayed with the Swane family, a few kilometers northeast 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, a man who meant a great deal to Andersen. With his usual sympathetic insight, Andersen wrote 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, and he was able to take pleasure in the enjoyment that his reading aloud gave the Swane family, including little Henrik, who loved stories. Despite this, fears of boils, ringworm, fever, and cholera cast dark shadows over the account in the diary. His stomach was causing him frightful problems because it was “loose,” and Andersen registered that a case of cholera had broken out in Horsens, so he was convinced that he had been infected with the disease. On Friday, September 2, Andersen notes that “The weather is fine, the state of my stomach already, it would seem,

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more firm. I dare not pray in my anxiety—for that will not change God's will in any way" (Andersen 2004, 362-63).

On his way to Hjermland, in the mail coach from Randers, Andersen had written a poem which he made a fair copy of and read aloud at the vicarage. It was called "Jylland" (Jutland) and was later published in the magazine *Illustreret Tidende* in 1860 and included 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, and since then has been a striking hymn of greeting to the Jutland peninsula. There is hardly a popular platform, church hall, or association in Jutland where "Jylland mellem tvende Have" (Jutland bounded by two oceans) is not regularly 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, "Heden Alvorsstor" (the heath of solemn greatness), depicting it as a place where "Ørknens Luftsyn bor" (the desert mirages live) and where "Loke sine Hjorde driver" (Loki drives his herds) (Andersen 2004, 320-21). The Heath is colossal and superior to man, Andersen declares, but he also demonstrates that he is well aware that this is a place that will soon be transformed, using phrases such as "snart Dampdragen flyve vil" (soon the steam-dragon will be flying) and "Britten flyver over Hav" (the British fly across the sea). Andersen is a tourist and a traveling 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 by which he was fascinated but about which he had his misgivings. His seismographic awareness of the fantasy of 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 in the twenty-first century. The desert mirage is not thin air. The Jutland Heath is, incidentally, present in many other works by Andersen. In the novel *O. T.* from 1836 the Jutland Heath appears as a location of 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 traveled the heath, he was not without prior knowledge of it. Andersen had read and admired Blicher, and thus he traveled, 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, 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 abovementioned *Opdagelsen af Jylland* (Frandsen 1996). Steen Steensen Blicher repeatedly portrayed the Heath, perhaps most beautifully in the poem "Hjemvee" (Homesickness), with the lines: "Kiær est du, Fødeland, sødt er dit Navn, til dig staar dine Sønners stærke Længsel" (Dear are you, land of our birth, sweet is your name, for you do your sons greatly yearn) from 1814. In the nineteenth century, along with Hans Christian Andersen, Blicher helped create the Jutlanders' place and thereby contributed to a Jutlandic nation-building, as depicted in the section "A New Geography" in Mai's book. 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 its own way in portraying a threatened biotope. It is in that movement that the Heath was transformed from a physical space to a desert mirage, that is, to an eternal literary place of inheritance.

Remembering 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 *The Sand-Hills of Jutland*—took the initiative of collecting money from Danish Americans throughout the US in order to purchase almost two hundred acres of rolling heathland in Rebild Bakker. His aim was to

turn the hillsides into a conservation area and hold an annual rally to mark Danish American connections and revive memories for the many thousands of Danes who had emigrated to America. Henius, a chemist who grew up in Aalborg as the son of Isidor Henius, the founder of *De danske Spritfabrikker* (Danish Distillers), omitted mentioning 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, but Henius's 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 a special, ancient Danish type of countryside. Lastly, Henius felt that the Heath had special value as a commemorative place for many Danish Americans, because many of them had their origins precisely in the heathland regions of Jutland. The official opening of Rebild National Park was to have taken place on July 4, 1912, but because of the death of King Frederik VIII, the celebrations were postponed until August 5, when they were personally attended by King Christian X and Queen Alexandrine.

“A spot with a vale and clusters of reeds”

One of Max Henius's close friends, the opera singer Johannes Fønss (1884–1964) mentions in his book *Bagom breve, billeder – og begivenheder* (Behind letters, photos – and events, 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's absolute favorite 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,

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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 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. 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 industrial age that was developing created a new view of the land that was being lost. For a number of artists and intellectuals, the Heath was a place that symbolized 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 protect 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

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At the first Rebild celebration, held in the hills near Rold on August 5, 1912, Johannes Fønss declaimed Aakjær's poem "Kornmod" (Summer Lightning). In addition, Jeppe Aakjær had been asked to write a cantata for the occasion, which included 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.

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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 other than itself—a 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 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 predominated 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. Aakjær is actually depicting an outer nature that at once is both mighty and frail, and this is a double attitude also found in most of the artists involved in a literary movement around 1900 known as the Popular Breakthrough (*Det folkelige gennembrud*).

Many of the poets and writers known as the Limfjord writers were part of the Popular Breakthrough and 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 December 11, 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, "Naturfredning," *Politiken*, December 11, 1909; *Samlede Værker: Artikler og Taler*, vol. 4, 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 scour-

ing rain. No defiant crags of rock, no protective mountain chains stand guarding the plains.)

A revived, enterprising agricultural sector 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 energized by what they had gained from the Folk High School movement where they had studied and gained 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 kilometers of track being added during these years, in which the towns also steamed in a potent wave of industrialization. The onrush of development was land-consuming in quite a literal sense: thousands of hectares that had previously been bogland, heathland, commonland, or under water were put to the plow, drained, marled, fertilized and cultivated. Danish agriculture turned new layers of soil in a forward surge, the likes of which had never been seen before (Frandsen 2009, 536ff.).

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 migrants in time—they had grown up in one age, but as adult artists they 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 departure from a local region and lifestyle 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

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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 characterized 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, or the species is described as being greater than the free choice of the individual, and should the individual so much as 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.

These writers, 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 vigor 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 helped to create the utopias that were later formulated politically in demands for a welfare society (Frandsen 2009, 536ff.).

The Apostles of Planting

Writers such as Aakjær, Jensen, Bregendahl, and Skjoldborg realized that an age and a form of life was on the point of disappearing,

and that important values and forms would disappear at the same time. They saw and portrayed the gains and losses of a change from what they, with their own life-stories, were anchored in and shaped by. Thus the landscape was portrayed as a scene for recollection and as a great outdoor narrative that retained the possibilities of the past and future. They portrayed 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" (*Beplantningsapostlene*) and "The Gentlemen Heatherscarers" (*De Herrer Lyngforskrækkere*), 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 jydsk Hede. [. . .] Den jydsk Hede er blevet taget fra os gennem Overrumpling. Den vestjydsk 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, 486-87)

(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 recognize his own land. It is an extremely tedious thing to fiddle too much with a 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 in the same article Aakjær justifies his anger at the conduct of the Society for Heathland Reclamation because of its lack of understanding of the Jutland people, their temperament and form of life. 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 Sjælland 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 milehvævede Horisonter. Begge Naturopfattelser er intimt og inderligt forbundet med Folkekaraktererne i Øst og Vest.
(Aakjær 1918, 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) 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 was claimed that the Jutland Heath had created and given the Jutlander his “hardened, knotted appearance, bushy eyebrows, his stubborn will, his feeling of loneliness, his humility towards God and Nature” (“hærdede, knudrede Skikkelse, buskede Øjenbuer, hans stejle Vilje, hans Ensomhedsfølelse, hans Ydmyghed overfor Gud og Alnaturen”) (489). A cultivating conquest of the Heath was thus framed as an assault, a killing, a murder of the Jutlander and Jutland history. But it entailed also the annihilation of a biotope and of an aesthetic resource that can never be regenerated, which means that it was the Danes’ historical recollections, the marrow of the tribe that was being broken and annihilated. That is why Jeppe Aakjær fought to preserve “the mirage of the great desert,” quoting and referring to both Hans Christian Andersen and Blicher quite deliberately and enthusiastically.

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 encompassed within declared conservation areas 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 had been made to cultivate the heath. It was the Mecklenburg officer Ludwig von Kahlen who first tried in 1754 to plow the land. With the support of Frederik V, he built 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. It lies outside our scope here to deal with the harsh life of the so-called “Potato Germans,” but they left their mark in some of the local place names—and perhaps also the spread of the potato! In 1913, a rich merchant, Hans Dall, bought a total of thirteen hundred hectares of heathland at Kongenshus. Together with Johannes Bech, he started a reindeer farm that was 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 venture. Aakjær condemned 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, Aakjær repeats and intensifies a number of the arguments he and his generation of Jutland poets and writers had made for the conservation and future protection of 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* (Songs of the rye) from 1906, which was written in Sjørup, on the edge of the present-day Kongenshus Mindepark. In *Rugens Sange* 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 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 Steen Steensen Blicher. The Romantics

saw the Heath as a special place, while Aakjær and his generation helped to salvage scraps of it before it stood completely “as a field of corn.”

Today the Jutland Heath is a symbol as well as a series of concrete locations that can be visited at places like Rebild Bakker and Kongenshus Mindepark. Today the parks 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!

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