

Gerhard Munthe's Folktale Tapestries: Designing a Norwegian National Narrative in the
Nineteenth Century

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In beginning a document that thinks about the longing for home, I find myself overcome with gratitude for those who have provided me with a home, a home that made beginning and finishing this document possible. Home is “the place where one lives or was brought up” as well as “a refuge, a sanctuary; a place or region to which one naturally belongs or where one feels at ease.”¹ I feel myself to have “been brought up” as an art historian within the Department of Art History at the University of Minnesota, and it is a place where I feel at ease, a place where I have felt the comfort of supportive and encouraging words from intelligent, engaged, kind, and warm-hearted people. The sort of people that critique chapter drafts, calm fears and frustrations, and provide much needed moments of respite from self-doubt.

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¹ "home, n.1 and adj.". OED Online. June 2014. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.ezp3.lib.umn.edu/view/Entry/87869?rskey=m2tTAv&result=1&isAdvanced=false>
(accessed June 30, 2014).

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	pp. i-ii
Table of Contents	p. iii
List of Figures	p. iv-vii
Introduction	
A Norwegian Artist of Note	pp. 1-11
Chapter One	
Crafting the Norwegian Nation	pp. 12-66
Chapter Two	
Weaving the Story: Imagining and Re-imagining the Nation	pp. 67-118
Chapter Three	
Retelling the Tale: Folklore and Modernity	pp. 119-167
Conclusion	
Looking Back Again	pp. 168-171
Bibliography	pp. 172-178

List of Figures

- Fig. 1.1 The Numedal Farmstead at the Norwegian Folk Museum (Photo courtesy of the Norsk Folkemuseum)
p. 59
- Fig. 1.2 The Telemark Farmstead at the Norwegian Folk Museum (Photo courtesy of the Norsk Folkemuseum and Anne-Lise Reinsfelt)
p. 59
- Fig. 1.3 The Stave Church from Gol in the Collections of King Oscar II at the Norwegian Folk Museum, Axel Lindahl, 1885-90
p. 60
- Fig. 1.4 The Stave Church from Gol completed on Bygdøy in the summer of 1885, Axel Lindahl, 1885-1890
p. 61
- Fig. 1.5 Paris Exposition: Norwegian Pavilion, Paris, France, 1900, [Pavilion de la Norvège. Western portion of the Quai des Nations.]
p. 62
- Fig. 1.6 *The Stave Church at Gol in Hallingdal*, Hans Gude, 1846
p. 63
- Fig. 1.7 Photograph of the exhibit of the National Museum of Decorative Arts in Trondheim (*Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum*) at the Paris Exposition 1900
p. 63
- Fig. 1.8 *The Norwegian Pavilion at the Universal Exhibition of 1900, Paris*, illustration from *Le Petit Journal*, 13 May 1900
p. 64
- Fig. 1.9 Photograph of the collection of Old Norwegian Folk Art at the Decorative Arts and Design Museum in Kristiania, installation of hall by Gerhard Munthe, from *Dekorative Kunst*
p. 65

- Fig. 1.10 View of King Oscar II's Collection at the open-air museum of the Norwegian Folk Museum, Axel Lindahl, 1885-90
p. 66
- Fig. 1.11 Hove House, relocated to Bygdøy 1881, Axel Lindahl, 1885-90
p. 66
- Fig. 2.1 Gerhard Munthe, *Daughters of the Northern Lights (The Suitors)*, designed 1892 (woven 1899)
p. 114
- Fig. 2.2 Gerhard Munthe, *Daughters of the Northern Lights*, 1892 (watercolor)
p. 114
- Fig. 2.3 Gerhard Munthe, *The Three Brothers*, designed 1908
p. 115
- Fig. 2.4 Gerhard Munthe, *The Three Princesses*, 1892 (watercolor)
p. 115
- Fig. 2.5 Gerhard Munthe, *Potetopptagning (Potato Picking)*, 1878
p. 116
- Fig. 2.6 Gerhard Munthe, *Oktoberaften (October Evening)*, 1881
p. 116
- Fig. 2.7 Drawing from Gerhard Munthe's notebook, National Library Oslo
p. 117
- Fig. 2.8 Sketch from Munthe's notebook, c. 1870s, National Library Oslo
p. 118
- Fig. 2.9 Sketch from Munthe's notebook, c. 1870s, National Library Oslo
p. 118

- Fig. 3.1 Gerhard Munthe, *Daughters of the Northern Lights*, designed 1892 (woven 1899)
p. 156
- Fig. 3.2 Japanese textile pattern from *Japanische Textilomamenten*, V, Berlin, 1892
p. 156
- Fig. 3.3 Japanese textile design from *Japanische Textilomamenten*, IV, Berlin, 1892
p. 157
- Fig. 3.4 Gerhard Munthe, *Silver Roses*, watercolor wallpaper pattern, 1896
p. 157
- Fig. 3.5 Gerhard Munthe, *Little Kjersti*, c. 1900
p. 158
- Fig. 3.6 *Baldishol Tapestry*, Norwegian, late twelfth century
p. 158
- Fig. 3.7 Gerhard and Sigrun Munthe sitting in front of the fireplace, Leveld, Lysaker
p. 159
- Fig. 3.8 Fig. 3.8 Gerhard Munthe, *Fire Play (Ildens lek)*, detail, 1914
p. 160
- Fig. 3.9 Gerhard Munthe, Chair for the *Fairytale Room* at the Holmenkollen Tourist Hotel, (designed 1896)
p. 160
- Fig. 3.10 William Morris, *Peacock and Dragon*, c. 1878
p. 161
- Fig. 3.11 Hermann Obrist, *Whiplash textile (Peitchenhieb)*, c. 1895
p. 161

- Fig. 3.12 Victor Horta, *Tassel House*, first floor interior view, 1893, Brussels
p. 162
- Fig. 3.13 Hector Guimard, Plate 64 from *Le Castel Béranger*, oeuvre de Hector Guimard, Architecte, 1898
p. 162
- Fig. 3.14 James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Caprice in Purple and Gold, No. 2: The Golden Screen*, 1864
p. 163
- Fig. 3.15 Claude Monet, *La Japonaise* (Madame Monet in a kimono), 1876
p. 163
- Fig. 3.16 Utagawa Kunisada, *The actor Onoe Kikujiro in the role of the maid Ohatsu in the play 'Kagamiyama Gonichi no ishibumi,'* 1855
p. 164
- Fig. 3.17 Kitagawa Utamaro, *The Courtesan Hinazaru at the Keizetsuru from Comparing the Charms of Beautiful Women*, c.1794-5
p. 164
- Fig. 3.18 The Japanese Court from the London International Exhibition of 1862
p. 165
- Fig. 3.19 Edvard Munch, *The Scream*, 1895
p. 166
- Fig. 3.20 Gerhard Munthe, *Aften I Eggedal (Evening in Eggedal)*, 1889
p. 167

Introduction: A Norwegian Artist of Note

“I held the child up to the hole. I didn’t know him or speak his language. We stood like that and together watched the side of the dance duet, or watched the empty stage when we couldn’t see the dancers. A kind of accident, a coincidence, brought us together in that way, in proximity of performance, with the sun going down. It lasted only a moment.”²

Matthew Goulish

The performance artist Matthew Goulish offers a revealing and apt metaphor for understanding the art historical process in his description of an experience watching a performance through a strange aperture in a wall. While in Switzerland, having arrived late for a performance at the Belluard Bollwerk, Goulish found himself watching the performance through an unusual window, which he describes as follows:

The three-foot thick stone walls of the fortress featured a few of these oddly placed windows, each one with a nine-inch diameter circular hole at the interior edge, tapering open to an horizontal oval, three feet wide and eighteen inches high, at the exterior edge. This shape allowed a wide field of vision for somebody looking out, but a narrow field for somebody looking in, like us. . .

² Matthew Goulish, *39 Microlectures in Proximity of Performance* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 23.

Under the stage lights, from my viewpoint, they [the performers] resembled a miniature moving diorama.³

Much like Goulish looking in at the performance, the art historian's field of vision is necessarily limited. Just as the aperture limits Goulish's ability to see the performance, so the passing of time limits the historian's ability to "see" or "know" the past. As a result, history, based on fragments, is an attempt to interpret and understand the information at hand, while acknowledging that which no longer exists or cannot be seen. It perhaps seems unusual to begin a dissertation about late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Norway with a story told by a contemporary performance artist. However, Goulish's distant and limited experience of the performance is similar to the contemporary experience of watching the performance of Norwegian nationalism through an examination of historical narratives and decorative arts.

The nineteenth century proved to be a time of significant political, social, and economic changes for Norwegians, beginning, in some sense, with the declaration of Norway's independence on May 17, 1814. On this day, the Norwegian independent constitution became law. Prior to this, and since 1380, Norwegians had been subject to the Danish monarchy. During the over four-hundred year period of subjugation, Danish became the official language of Norway and thousands of Danes settled in Norwegian cities. Although the two countries remained linked for centuries, the Danish monarchy chiefly enacted laws to benefit Denmark alone, for example, limiting Norway's ability to import and export goods, such as corn, unless they were coming from or going to

³ Goulish, 21.

Denmark.⁴ However, on January 14, 1814, according to the terms of the Treaty of Kiel, the Danish king, after siding with France in a losing battle, ceded Norway to Sweden. Norway, however, did not accept the terms of this treaty and instead elected the crown-prince of Denmark, Christian Frederick, to be their monarch.⁵ The independent constitution and new monarch did not deter the Swedish crown-prince Carl Johan (formerly Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, a general in Napoleon's army).⁶ He deposed Christian Frederick later that same year and with the Convention of Moss on August 14, 1814 united Sweden and Norway. Norway arguably operated as an independent state under the Swedish monarchy for the rest of the nineteenth century. Independence from Sweden came in 1905 after the *Storting*, Norway's governing body, voted to dissolve the union with Sweden and chose Prince Carl of Denmark (King Haakon VII of Norway) as the new monarch.⁷

Among the Norwegians who experienced the effects of these shifts was the naturalist landscape painter and designer Gerhard Munthe (1849 – 1929). Munthe, the third of fourteen children, began his life on a farm in Elverum (the place by the river) in July of 1849. In the spring of 1870, having demonstrated an aptitude for drawing and despite initial plans that he would study medicine, Munthe traveled to the Norwegian capital, Christiania, to study painting. Although his teacher unfortunately died only two months into Munthe's studies, he stayed on and pursued his artistic education through the summer of 1874. That fall, Munthe traveled to Düsseldorf, an early decision that

⁴ Ronald Popperwell, *Norway* (New York: Praeger, 1972), 112-116.

⁵ Ibid, 28. For more on this see also Ivar Libæk and Øivind Stenersen, *History of Norway: From the Ice Age to the Oil Age* (Oslo: Grøndahl Dreyer, 1992), 38-64.

⁶ Surprisingly, Carl Johan won Sweden from Denmark by siding with England against Napoleon's forces.

⁷ Libæk and Stenersen, 62-64.

foreshadows other actions he would make with respect to his artistic career. Although Düsseldorf was a common destination for young Norwegian artists, by 1874, Munich had become the main city for artistic education in Germany. Munthe, aware of Munich's reputation and growing popularity, still chose to study in Düsseldorf, in part because his teachers in Christiania, Morton Müller and Knud Bergslien had studied there as well. While in Düsseldorf, Munthe did not enroll in an art academy proper, but rather spent his time learning and studying with the landscape painter, Ludvig Munthe (his third cousin), and going to museums, such as the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, to study the works of well-known artists including Rembrandt and Jacob van Ruisdael. Eventually, in 1877, Munthe went to Munich to study on a more permanent basis, and again did not enroll in an art academy. He did however spend time studying and working with Gabriel von Max, a history painter who became a professor at the Munich academy.⁸ Although Munich had a vibrant artistic community, Munthe spent his summers at home in Norway sketching and when he returned to Munich, he continued to pursue his independent artistic education, and made paintings based on his summertime sketches.⁹

Munthe's apparent fondness for his home country led him to return and work in the place that he faithfully had represented in his early work. During his lifetime, he became known for his landscapes depicting the Norwegian countryside and, to a lesser degree, the people who lived in those environs. Munthe found himself in good company in Norway and forged friendships with fellow artists, particularly during the summer of

⁸ Jan Kokkin ed., *Gerhard Munthe: En Radikal Stilskaper* (Lillehammer: Lillehammer Kunstmuseum in association with Labyrinth Press, 2011), 14.

⁹ *Ibid*, 18.

1886, when he spent time in Bærum with Erik Werenskiold, Christian Skredsvig, Harriet Backer, Kitty Kieland, and Eilif Peterssen. During this summer, the so-called “Fleskum summer,” Munthe also met Sigrun Sandberg; and the two married in December of that year.¹⁰

In the early 1890s, by that time well established in Norwegian artistic circles as a landscape painter, Munthe began to spend time making imaginative and stylized watercolors, many of them inspired by popular folktales, songs, and legends. A number of weavers, including Sigrun, used Munthe’s watercolors as designs and wove them into tapestries. Augusta Christensen, who went on to head the weaving school at the *Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum* (the National Museum of Decorative Arts and Design) in Trondheim, was the first weaver (after Sigrun) to translate Munthe’s watercolors into woven wall hangings.¹¹ Although Munthe’s tapestries and other design work might appear to represent a shift from his interest in the Norwegian landscape, the tapestries, along with other decorative objects Munthe designed, demonstrate the artist’s continuing promotion of and contribution to a Norwegian national art.

Various individuals with interests in the art world noted that Munthe’s decorative works, which distinguished him amongst the majority of his fellow artists (including his Fleskum friends), made significant contributions to the Norwegian nation. In an 1896 article appearing in the British design magazine *The Studio*, Karl V. Hammer details Munthe’s decorative work noting “The main motive of his work is to

¹⁰ Ibid, 27.

¹¹ Ibid, 76.

retain that which is national and traditional.”¹² A few years later, as part of a large volume published in conjunction with the 1900 Paris World’s Fair, and published in Norway as a review of the Norwegian contribution, art historian and director of the *Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum*, Jens Thiis offered adulation for Munthe. In a section devoted to Munthe’s work, Thiis explains that the artist broke with naturalism in 1893 when he presented his eleven fantastical designs based on popular Norwegian stories at the Black and White Exhibition in Kristiania (formerly Christiania, and now Oslo).¹³ These fantasies or “cartoons” were, according to Thiis, destined to be used as designs for some branch of industry, and as such, weavers following the “old” Norwegian manner of weaving had woven several examples, which were part of the Norwegian display at the exhibition (see fig. 1.3). Thiis goes on to describe Munthe as “not only an artist, but also a missionary;” for Thiis, Munthe’s artistic efforts helped build and share the idea of the Norwegian nation in a manner analogous to the efforts of religious proselytizers.¹⁴

The jurors of the 1900 Paris exhibition noted the national character of Munthe’s tapestries, stating “To him [Munthe] is due the honour of having created in our day a real national style of decorative art in Norway.”¹⁵ Furthermore, an article appearing in *The Studio* in 1900 and giving an overview of the Scandinavian decorative art included

¹² K(arl) V. Hammer, “Gerhard Munthe, Decorative Artist” *The Studio* v8.n42 (1896): 221.

¹³ The Norwegian capital city bore the name Christiania from 1624-1877, and Kristiania from 1877-1925. In 1925, it was renamed Oslo.

¹⁴ La Norvège: Ouvrage Officiel Publié a l’Occasion de l’Exposition Universelle de Paris 1900 (Kristiania [Oslo]: Imprimerie Centrale, 1900), 580.

¹⁵ Quoted in Jens Thiis, “The Museum of Applied Art at Trondhjem,” *Museums Journal* (March 1904): 284, reprinted in Jan-Lauritz Opstad, *Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseums Vævskole og Atelier for Kunstvævning 1898-1909* (Trondheim: Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum, 1983), 41.

in the Paris 1900 international exhibition notes that Munthe's tapestries feature "old Norwegian tales," however, the attention visitors paid to them was explained as being due to "their strange and weird style."¹⁶ Although the critical response to Munthe's tapestry designs varied, almost all who viewed and wrote about his work described it as national.

These early understandings and interpretations of Munthe's work as tied to the Norwegian nation serve as a starting point for a more critical look at his designs as well as his artistic career. In order to examine some of the assumptions present in the scholarship regarding Munthe and his design work, it is useful to consider the possibilities and limitations of such an undertaking. On the whole, Munthe was well-liked during his lifetime and as a result, his artworks have found their way into multiple museum collections.¹⁷ Moreover, his renown led critics, historians, and journalists to write articles and books that interpret and analyze his artistic production. Munthe also was a prolific writer who frequently contributed articles to magazines and newspapers, wrote hundreds of letters to family and friends, and even collected his writings in a book.¹⁸ Looking back, these compiled sources, in addition to the works themselves, are part of what can be seen through the aperture. These primary sources have encouraged critics and historians to reach similar and familiar assessments with regards to Munthe's

¹⁶ Sunny Frykholm, "Scandinavian Decorative Art" *The Studio* v21 (1901): 190 and 192.

¹⁷ Including, but not limited to, the *Kunstindustrimuseet* (Museum of Decorative Arts and Design) in Oslo, the *Norsk Folkemuseum* (Norwegian Folk Museum/Museum of Cultural History) in Oslo, the *Nordenfjelske Kunstindustrimuseum* (National Museum of Decorative Arts) in Trondheim, the *Hordamuseet* (Horda Museum) outside of Bergen and the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah, Iowa.

¹⁸ The National Library in Oslo has an extensive archive of materials on Munthe, including hundreds of letters he wrote and received, his sketchbooks and journals, plans and designs for interiors, furniture and tapestries, and newspaper clippings of articles about or by the artist. See also Gerhard Munthe, *Minder og Meninger* (Kristiania[Oslo]: Alb. Cammermeyers Forlag, 1919).

work as an artist and designer, forming an oft repeated art historical narrative around Munthe, Norway, and the nineteenth-century European artworld.

While Munthe's ties to the Norwegian nation persist in contemporary considerations of his work, Widar Halén, director of the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design in Oslo, has undertaken a few detailed surveys of the artist's work that focus attention on the international trends, particularly *japonisme*, the Arts and Crafts movement, the Aesthetic movement, *art nouveau*, and Symbolism, that he asserts influenced Munthe's designs. Halén's arguments also accept the understanding of Munthe as an artist inspired to promote his native country through his artwork and the notion that Munthe believed that designing decorative art objects provided an opportunity for people, including himself, to create environments that appeared expressive of a national spirit. Relying on supposed Norwegian craft traditions, particularly weaving, he sought to revitalize Norwegian industry and demonstrate that Norway had an independent history. Halén's overview of the national aspects of Munthe's designs and emphasis on Munthe's involvement in artistic circles outside of Norway gives a clearer picture of Munthe's place in the art world of nineteenth-century Europe. However, this approach also leaves Munthe's complicated involvement with the construction of Norwegian national identity unexamined. Working along similar lines as Halén, art historian Jan Kokkin argues that Munthe's *oeuvre* is characterized by a shift from naturalism to symbolism.¹⁹ Kokkin explores Munthe's career broadly, taking into account his paintings as well as his designs, and describes the artist as

¹⁹ See "Den Splittede Kunstner" (The Split Artist), in Jan Kokkin ed., Gerhard Munthe: En Radikal Stilskaper (Lillehammer: Lillehammer Kunstmuseum and Labyrinth Press, 2011), 9.

having an “aristocratic and conservative attitude.”²⁰ This labeling of Munthe relates to Kokkin’s examination of the interests and influences at play in his artworks as well as Munthe’s criticisms of fellow Norwegian artists. Of particular interest, Kokkin notes that fellow landscape painter Thorolf Holmboe, inspired by Japanese woodcuts and the work of the French Nabis artists, began producing book illustrations and tapestry designs in a two-dimensional style around 1890. Munthe and Werenskiold, both well-respected Norwegian painters, criticized Holmboe’s work, finding his incorporation of stylistic elements from Japanese prints particularly odious and going so far as to call Holmboe’s work “fraudulent and profane.”²¹ Munthe went on to use this two-dimensional style in his watercolors, which Werenskiold deemed a reaction against the Japanese influence.²² While Halén celebrates Munthe’s participation in and engagement with international trends in the art world, Kokkin’s work invites an examination of the artist’s ambivalent attitude toward new and changing artistic trends.

These scholarly examinations of Munthe’s artworks offer an interpretation of the artist’s paintings, tapestries, and other designs, and highlight Munthe’s various ties to the Norwegian and European art worlds. However, their analyses of Munthe and his works also follow on the heels of earlier assessments that skim over the folktales that the tapestries depict and accept the characterization of the tapestries as national without exploring or defining this characterization.

In order to better understand Munthe’s contribution to the Norwegian nation as an artist as well as the way in which decorative arts can be deployed in the construction

²⁰ Kokkin, 64.

²¹ Ibid, 52-3.

²² Ibid, 74.

of national identity, in chapter one, I examine the production of national narratives in Norwegian living-history and decorative arts museums as a precursor to and an extension of the Norwegian national pavilion and decorative arts display at the Paris 1900 World's Fair (fig. 1.7). The display included a number of Munthe's tapestries, one of which, *Daughters of the Northern Lights* (fig. 2.1), earned Munthe a gold medal.²³ Munthe, as a participant in the 1900 fair as well as a board member of both the *Norske Folkemuseum* (Norwegian Folk Museum) and the *Kunstindustrimuseet* (Museum of Industrial Design/Museum of Decorative Arts and Design) in Kristiania, would have been well aware of how museums, as cultural heritage institutions, operate, and thus, the way in which the display of objects could be deployed in crafting a narrative about the Norwegian people, art, and history.²⁴ Considering his designs in the context of his knowledge of display also provides a broader and simultaneously clearer picture of the construction of modern Norwegian nationhood.

With a better understanding of Munthe's manipulation of the national narrative and the strategic embrace of stereotypical ideas about the Norwegian peasant within this narrative, chapter two examines the way in which the tapestries materialize efforts to produce Norwegian heritage. Examining the stories depicted in the tapestries, the multiple meanings they convey, and efforts to produce heritage by means of the construction and collection of "the people" illustrates the close ties between Munthe's

²³ Ibid, 76.

²⁴ Stephan Tschudi Madsen, "Morris and Munthe" *The Journal of the William Morris Society* (1964): 37, and F. Deneksen, "Das Kunstindustriemuseum in Kristiania" *Dekorative Kunst* v13, issue 5 (February 1905): 195.

designs and national projects that sought to document Norwegian folklore and salvage a Norwegian language, as well as their shared flaws, contradictions, and assumptions.

In chapter three, the relationships between the tapestries' supposed contributions to the nation, participation in internationalism, and broader role in the narrative of art history are examined. I argue that the tapestries' reference to oral tales that circulate through the repetition of narratives mimics the repetitive narrative of modernity, which Munthe may have recognized. Modernity, in the form of international trends, including the Aesthetic movement, the Arts and Crafts movement, *art nouveau*, *japonisme*, and Symbolism, depends upon the repetition, borrowing, and adaptation of ideas. This understanding of modernity, allows a glimpse into the workings of an experimental yet conservative Norwegian artist who likely recognized that the production of the past along with a mining of the present remained central to the creation of a modern Norwegian decorative art.

Chapter One

Crafting the Norwegian Nation

Art is a field in which the political landscape can be navigated, metaphorically, especially through the exhibition which seems to demonstrate the genius and in some way, supremacy of a particular nation.²⁵

Francis Haskell

Central to the project set forth in the introduction is the concept of the nation, how it is defined and, specifically, what it signified during the nineteenth century. It is difficult, if not impossible, to construct an exact chronology of the events that led to Norwegian national independence in 1905, and the effort to do so assumes that such a development exists or that a narrative can be formed. In an effort to move beyond historical projects that discuss the modern evolution of the Norwegian nation as a struggle culminating in independence,²⁶ and art historical projects that examine the artistic production from this time as national and/or international,²⁷ I have pulled on the loose threads these projects leave behind in order to unravel Norwegian nationalism, examine its contradictions and its ties to the decorative arts. In order to explore these

²⁵ Francis Haskell, *The Ephemeral Museum: Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 106.

²⁶ See, for example, Ronald G. Popperwell, *Norway* (London: Ernest Benn Limited: 1972).

²⁷ See, for example, Widar Halén, "Gerhard Munthe: a Norwegian Pioneer in the Decorative Arts." *Apollo* v151.n459 (2000): 11-18, and S(unny) Frykholm, "Scandinavian Decorative Art," *The Studio* v21 (1901): 190-199.

contradictions and further elucidate the relationship between the imagining of the Norwegian nation and decorative arts, I argue that during the nineteenth century, the production of narratives that trace a progressive trajectory for Norway's history, within historical and decorative arts museums, along with art objects and visual culture, played a major role in constructing, defining, and promoting Norway as an independent, European nation. The Norwegian artist Gerhard Munthe, through his role as a board member of the *Norsk Folkemuseum* (Norwegian Folk Museum) and the *Kunstindustrimuseet* (Museum of Decorative Arts and Design) in Oslo, participated in the nation-building process which effectively manipulated Norway's past as well as criticisms of Norway to construct and promote a modern Norwegian national identity.²⁸

Remnants of the nation-building process linger in the continued popularity of the *Norsk Folkemuseum* (Norwegian Folk Museum), which Hans Aall founded in 1894. The Museum, located just outside of Oslo and along the same road as the *Vikingskipshuset* (Viking Ship Museum), attempts to preserve, continue, and present an historic vision of Norwegian life. "The countryside" area of the open-air museum features an assembled array of rustic, wooden buildings from different parts of Norway; these structures include barns, sod-roofed homes, storehouses, guest houses, and other farmstead buildings. Situated in a verdant (and at times snow-covered) landscape, this array of structures conjures a vision of a typical Norwegian rural village and evokes a

²⁸ Stephan Tschudi Madsen, "Morris and Munthe" *The Journal of the William Morris Society* (1964): 37, and F. Deneksen, "Das Kunstindustriemuseum in Kristiania" *Dekorative Kunst* v13, issue 5 (February 1905): 195.

sense of timelessness (figs. 1.1-1.2).²⁹ Animals, including horses, cows, goats, and sheep, contribute to this vision of everyday life, as do their caretakers and “village inhabitants” who dress in nineteenth-century costumes while feeding the animals or discussing the making of lefse.³⁰ The interiors of most of the buildings are dark, despite the fact that many were brightly painted, and the smell of stale smoke from countless fires kept for warmth and food preparation still permeates the air. Outside, in the bright light of day, the pungent smell of the animals furthers the subtle message that this place and these spaces offer an authentic representation of folk life, a representation that is “true to life.”³¹

Although Aall is noted as the founder of The Norwegian Folk Museum, the collection of the Swedish-Norwegian King Oscar II, formed in 1881 and incorporated into the museum proper in 1907, preceded the museum and demonstrates the dual monarch’s attempt to legitimate his political authority in Norway through a demonstrated interest in Norwegian culture and history. The transformation of the

²⁹ The buildings come from various regions throughout Norway, but cohere around the idea that throughout Norway’s history there was no feudal system of land ownership. Farmers of varying economic levels built these structures on land that they owned and could pass down in their families.

³⁰ According to the Norsk Folkemuseum website <http://www.norskfolkemuseum.no/en/Experience/> (accessed 6/23/2013), lefse making demonstrations happen every Saturday and Sunday.

³¹ This representation of folk life at an outdoor “living history” museum is quite different from other more pristine presentations of the past. For instance, when Colonial Williamsburg first opened the buildings, which had been restored, continued to be painted all at the same time, and the entire “town” had a polished, unsullied smell and appearance. During the 1970s, social historians concerned with the inaccuracies conveyed in the pristine character of Williamsburg sought to create a more “accurate” or authentic experience of late-eighteenth-century life, and thus maintenance left horse droppings or “road apples” in the streets and did not tend to peeling paint. However, the greatest shift in “town” has been the increased population of black interpreters. As Magelssen points out, the chief problem of Williamsburg was not the sanitation of eighteenth century standards of living, but rather the sanitation of history that the site’s curators and social historians enact through a celebration of white patriots. Magelssen, pp 30-31 and 77-81. See also, “authentic, adj. and n.”. OED Online. June 2014. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.ezp1.lib.umn.edu/view/Entry/13314?rkey=PUEzFP&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed July 05, 2014).

Bygdøy peninsula near Oslo into a public park began in the 1830s, under an initiative of King Carl Johan and expanded with his grandson King Oscar's relocation of five historic buildings to the site, including the stave church from Gol and the so-called Hove House (figs. 1.3 and 1.4).³² A photograph from the late 1880s (fig. 1.4) shows the location of the Hove House on the hill just beyond the church with a farmhouse installed across the gravel road. A forest of largely coniferous trees serves as a backdrop for the two homes, and additional pine trees are interspersed on the grounds around the church. King Oscar's open-air museum provided city-dwellers a brief escape into country life as well as a walk through history. Despite the Swedish-Norwegian king's effort to demonstrate his commitment to the preservation of Norwegian culture and history, his small museum served to diminish further his legitimacy in Norway. The church that he had rebuilt even served as a point of inspiration for the independent Norwegian national pavilion designed for the 1900 Paris World's Fair (fig. 1.5). King Oscar's efforts to support and participate in the national narrative furthered independence rather than a sentiment of alliance with Sweden, in part because independent Norwegian nationhood seemed historically appropriate and well-earned after over four hundred years under Danish rule.

³² For more see Astrid Santa ed., "Oscar II's Collection"
<http://www.norskfolkemuseum.no/en/Exhibits/The-Open-Air-Museum/Oscar-IIs-Collection/>

Why a Nation?

In an 1882 lecture to the Sorbonne titled “What is a Nation?” Ernst Renan stated “the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things.”³³ Renan’s lecture focuses chiefly on the development of the French nation, but his argument goes beyond the particulars of France to discuss other European nations and peoples. He observes that nations are new in terms of history, an idea that is echoed in contemporary literature on the nation.³⁴ Furthermore, Renan recognizes that one of the “things in common” among the individuals of a nation cannot be race, because there is no pure race.³⁵ He argues instead that commonalities are based on two things:

One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. . . . To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more – these are the essential conditions for being a people.³⁶

To borrow language from Benedict Anderson, Renan was one of the first nationalists to read nationalism “genealogically,” which is to say “as the expression of an historical

³³ Ernst Renan, Martin Thom trans. “What is a Nation?” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), 11.

³⁴ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983) and Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

³⁵ Renan, 9 and 14.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 19.

tradition of serial continuity.”³⁷ During the nineteenth century, in the wake of the United States’ recent claim to the nation as something utterly new, many Europeans, including Renan, felt the need to explain their existence and particularly their nationhood as not coming after America’s. In conceiving of the nation *genealogically*, nationalists, such as Renan, were able to explain away the newness of their nationhood, offering a narrative of an “awakening” which “opened up an immense antiquity behind the epochal sleep.”³⁸ Using the genealogical approach, Renan constructs a romantic and idyllic vision of the nation that is based on naming what presumably already exists. A group of people share a common set of experiences, and in order to go forward together as a powerful entity, they formally unite, thus forming a nation. Such a definition assumes that the nation exists preternaturally or develops naturally over time and needs only to be named and have geographic borders drawn, however, this certainly is not the case.

Nation formation is often a violent process, which Renan discusses early on in his essay when he notes the national need for forgetting. Yet, his ultimate conclusion about the nation lacks any engagement with the problems that forgetting creates when a nation is constructed and perpetuated.³⁹ Renan asserts that forgetting often is done when the violence that took place resulted in the greater good. Despite his concession, the “greater good” is not always what results, which disrupts his idyllic vision for the nation. Anderson addresses the contradiction at the heart of Renan’s argument for

³⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1991), 195.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Renan, 11.

forgetting, observing “Having to ‘have already forgotten’ tragedies of which one needs unceasingly to be ‘reminded’ turns out to be a characteristic device in the later construction of national genealogies.”⁴⁰ The imperative to have forgotten particular national tragedies that occurred in the distant past (and yet remember that they “have been forgotten”), which no one in the imagined community of the present moment experienced, contributes to the building of a shared history, and the belief that the nation has moved past such tragedies into a promising present and future. While the tragedies of the French nation that need to be remembered as forgotten differ from those of other European nations, including Norway, the genealogical approach towards nationalism that Renan presents is not definitively French.⁴¹

Certainly, for Norway, the tragedy nationalists in the nineteenth century most readily desired to forget already, and yet continually remember, was the over four-hundred-year union with Denmark. By the late nineteenth century, most of the people living in Norway would not have experienced first-hand the trials of Danish rule, which came to an end in 1814, but instead felt the frustrations of Norway’s subjugation to the Swedish monarchy. Nevertheless, the long-held power of the Danish monarchy, which contributed to a depressed economy and the relative isolation of the majority of Norwegian towns and communities, continued to affect Norway after 1814. In the eighteenth century, the Danish government put in place measures that encouraged Norway to trade with Denmark fairly exclusively, while failing to allocate funds to

⁴⁰ Anderson, 1991, 201.

⁴¹ Ibid, 200-201.

Norway to support domestic industry.⁴² When Sweden and Carl Johan took political control of Norway in November 1814, Norway continued to face financial difficulties, in part due to the lack of a national bank or credit-issuing institution. Norwegians found themselves particularly upset at the fact that the Swedish government asked them to help pay for a share of the national debt of Denmark-Norway, since the Danish government had taken advantage of their power and used various Dano-Norwegian banks to finance the expenditures of the government that had benefited solely Denmark.⁴³

While it might seem odd to contextualize Norwegian nationhood in terms of a French perspective on the meaning and significance of the nation, the French nation did affect Norwegian nationalism during the nineteenth century as well as the Norwegian historical narrative. With this in mind, it therefore is fitting to consider Renan's theoretical propositions within a project that endeavors to understand what the nation represented during the nineteenth century. Whether or not any Norwegians actually heard or read Renan's lecture is not what is important in this context, rather what is useful is the mindset about the nation, the fact that it was recognized as needing a definition, and one that was full of optimism at that.

Regardless of whether or not Renan's ideas specifically were known to Norwegian nationalists, knowledge of the American and French Revolutions and the resulting political circumstances was widespread in Europe and America. In fact, the Norwegian historian, Peter Andreas Munch (Edvard Munch's uncle, 1810-1863)

⁴² Popperwell, 110-111.

⁴³ Ibid, 110-112 and 122-123.

admired the French national model and particularly the Revolutionary cry “*liberté, égalité, fraternité,*” although he felt the motto would be better as “nationality, equality, liberty.”⁴⁴ Nationality took precedence over brotherhood and was of primary importance for Munch, who spent a great part of his career writing about and constructing a national narrative for Norway. Munch’s extensive writings, which cover topics including Norwegian history, language, and geography, seem to give credence to the claim that Norway had a long and unique history (one that perhaps could be used as a basis for the common experiences Renan mentioned) and a unified population. Whereas Renan denied the search for racial purity, Munch believed that a nationality which could be linked to racial purity would be the ideal, although he did realize that this was an untenable theory.⁴⁵ Despite his troubling and fortunately thwarted hopes for a nation built on racial unity, Munch’s substantial efforts as a historian demonstrate that he realized it was crucial for Norway to be an independent nation. Together, his writings strive to document and explain “Norwegian-ness” and create a *genealogical* narrative for Norway’s nationhood.⁴⁶ Norway’s status as a domain of the Swedish monarchy notwithstanding, Munch’s literary labors helped project an image of Norway as a naturally independent nation. The idea of inherent independence that Munch promoted stemmed in part from the argument that peasants in Norway throughout history, a history marked by economically and politically disadvantageous political

⁴⁴ Oscar Falnes, *National Romanticism in Norway* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), 112.

⁴⁵ Falnes, 131-133.

⁴⁶ Munch’s interest in the French Revolution, and on Norway’s medieval past come through particularly in the focus of his *Verdenshistoriens vigtigste Begivenheder: fra de aeldste Tider indtil den franske Revolution I kortfattet Fremstilling* (Christiania: Cappelen, 1840) and *Det norske Folks Historie* which comprises eight volumes that conclude at the end of the fourteenth century.

unions, never had been subjected to serfdom, but rather always had owned and worked their own land, and thus, embodied an enduring independent spirit.

In this guise of independence, Norway could participate in and help manufacture modern European-ness, an international modernity predicated upon national modernity. During the nineteenth century, part of modern European-ness meant participating in world's fairs and international exhibitions, which displayed the products of distinct nations to the multitudes who visited and viewed the elaborate exhibits. These exhibitions depended on visual and material culture to create and sustain visions of modern nationhood. Anderson confirms the prominent role of the image in the manufacture of nationhood in his definition of the nation as an imagined community, stating "It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the *image* of their communion" (emphasis added).⁴⁷ These exhibitions offered an ideal opportunity for nation-builders to construct the image that would live in the minds of "fellow-members" as well as non-members.

Norway created this image at the 1900 Paris World's Fair, in part through the construction of an independent national pavilion, (fig. 1.5). The pavilion architecture unmistakably referenced wooden stave churches built during the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries in Norway, notably a period before the union with Denmark, and thus alluded to the fact that Norway had a history of strength and independence. In comparing the 1900 pavilion with the stave church from Gol (fig. 1.3), both have

⁴⁷ Anderson, 1991, 6.

sharply peaked and gabled rooflines, as well as tall, pointed spires that rise from the highest steeple. Pavilion architect Holger Sinding-Larsen shifted the enclosed porch, located on the ground-floor of the church, to the second story of the pavilion, and made the entrance more inviting through the use of three arched openings.⁴⁸ Through its architectural vocabulary, the pavilion intentionally brings Norwegian history to the fore – a history Munch wrote and celebrated – and specifically references a time period in which Norway was sovereign.

The pavilion's similarity to the stave church from Gol supports the assertion that Norwegian nationalists relied upon the genealogical approach in their efforts to establish Norwegian nationhood. The installation of the Gol church at Bygdøy in 1885 provides a literal and metaphorical example of the construction of a Norwegian history. The Society for the Preservation of Ancient Norwegian Monuments bought the stave church in 1881. Originally built in the twelfth century, the church had been modified over the years to accommodate its growing congregation. King Oscar II paid for the relocating and rebuilding of the church on Bygdøy, where he had his summer residence. As a result of the various modifications made to the church, which supposedly are evident in Hans Gude's mid-nineteenth-century drawing of the church *in situ* (fig. 1.6), the Society only reused the church interior for the reconstruction. In an attempt to construct a church that would represent the structure's twelfth-century origins, the

⁴⁸ Ferdinand Wyeth Peck, *Report of the Commissioner-General for the United States to the International Universal Exposition, Paris, 1900: Volume I* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), 105, and Ingeborg Glambeck, "Discovering the Nordic Barbarians-International Exhibitions and World Fairs 1900-1914," (paper presented at Historical Lab 1, Brussels, Belgium, October 22, 2005): 3.

Society based the exterior reconstruction on Borgund Stave Church in Sogn.⁴⁹ The emphasis upon restoring and reconstructing the architecture from the period before the union of Norway with Denmark that began in the late fourteenth century and ended in 1814 with Sweden's assumption of political control – encourages the notion that the years of union with Denmark and then Sweden were to be viewed as a time of national sleep or rest for Norway. The Norwegian nation at its core, thus, should be understood as the Norway that existed prior to these unions, and while these political unions are part of a shared history, for the good of the Norwegian nation, the people should forget-remember them always. Since the union with Sweden persisted in 1900 and the union with Denmark existed in the not-so-distant past, the troublesome truth of these disadvantageous unions needed to be set aside symbolically, despite remaining at the forefront of the national conscience.

Furthering the message set forth in the pavilion's architecture, which cited the style of the stave church in King Oscar's open-air museum, the display of the Trondheim Museum of Applied Art (*Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum*/National Museum of Decorative Arts) featured a collection of tapestries designed by the artist Gerhard Munthe (fig. 1.7). A photograph of the ordered display demonstrates the prominent positioning of Munthe's tapestries. *Daughters of the Northern Lights*, shown hanging on the wall in the upper-left corner of the photograph, garnered the attention of critics and earned the designer a gold medal. Munthe's pictorial and patterned tapestries (explored in greater detail in chapter two) along with the pavilion architecture depend

⁴⁹ "Stave Church from Gol" Norsk Folkemuseum Oslo, website <http://www.norskfolkemuseum.no/en/Exhibits/The-Open-Air-Museum/Oscar-IIs-Collection/Stave-Church-from-Gol/> (accessed July 23, 2013)

upon the seeming conflict between the present and the past inherent to the genealogical understanding of the nation. Sinding-Larsen and Munthe negotiated this conflict through the use of a visual language invoking the present (1900) as the moment of Norway's great awakening, while relying on references to historic architecture, folktales, and craft techniques to reify the nation's enduring independence.

Munthe's engagement with the nation and the role that it should play in the production of art comes through strongly in his 1898 essay "Kunstværdier" (Values in Art), in which he argues that what makes art "monumental" or able "to defy the ravages of time" and "endure" can in large part be attributed to its loyal expression of nationality.⁵⁰ He describes the nation in terms similar to Renan, asserting:

A nation is built on a people's common circumstances and on the country's capacity for leadership and religious thought. What we call nationality is the distinctive character which these common circumstances create so that one group segregates itself from another in the way it thinks and conceptualizes . . . no people can rightfully claim to be called a nation unless they have revealed a special intellectual will and a distinctive common position in spiritual matters.⁵¹

Munthe, like Renan, finds that having things in common is an important characteristic of the people that comprise the nation. However, he goes beyond Renan and argues for a shared and unique mentality as well as a unified spiritual attitude amongst the people. He furthers his emphasis on the primary importance of the national in art through his

⁵⁰ Gerhard Munthe, Marion Nelson trans., "Kunstværdier" from *Minder og Meninger* (Kristiania: Albert Cammermeyers Forlag, 1919), available at The Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum Library, 4.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 10.

criticism for the contemporary celebration of the artist as a “citizen of the world,”
opining:

In exhibitions we often see pictures in one national division that would fit just as well or better in another; and one finds both technical jargon and an Esperanto of art as if to document that the artist is a real man of culture who follows up with developments and has reaped concrete results from his studies.⁵²

Munthe’s critical tone towards the notion and artistic production of the worldly artist is not surprising considering the stance he boldly articulates in the same treatise, “I am of the personal opinion that *the entire history of art and all logic* points to the national as an absolute and demonstrable hallmark of monumentality in art” (emphasis added).⁵³

His broad esteem for artworks that seemingly demonstrate uniquely national characteristics reflects his own artistic practice and thus further promotes the notion that his work expresses “Norwegian-ness,” and thus has “lasting value” and will “endure.”⁵⁴

Invoking the Primitive

An illustration in the French newspaper *Le Petit Journal* in May of 1900 conjures a vision of Norway based on the 1900 pavilion (fig. 1.8).⁵⁵ The color lithograph imagines the pavilion as if transported into a Norwegian landscape, a vision strikingly similar to the installation of the stave church at Bygdøy. In the illustration, the

⁵² Ibid, 11.

⁵³ Ibid, 9.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 4 and 7.

⁵⁵ “Exposition de 1900: Pavillon de la Norvège” *Le Petit Journal* (supplement illustre) (May 13, 1900).

pavilion is no longer along the river Seine as part of *La Rue des Nations*, but rather is situated in a coniferous forest, although still along a river bank.⁵⁶ In the foreground of the image, across the river from the pavilion, a fifer leads the procession of a wedding party, the type of event that would not be out of place at the Norwegian Folk Museum. The groom has taken off his hat and appears to salute the Norwegian flag that flutters in the breeze, suspended from a flagpole that stands in the river bank. His gesture also may be a greeting to his fellow countryman, who stands near the river's edge holding a fish. The wooded environment that surrounds the pavilion on three sides suggests that Norway remains largely uncultivated or at least not particularly urban. The fisherman alludes to the important Norwegian fishing industry, while the dirndls the women in the wedding party wear mark them as Norwegian, or rather more generally as Scandinavian. The flag, a symbol of nationhood, bears the sign of the Swedish union in the upper right corner. Although the pavilion architecture encourages an imagining of Norway as independent based on its references to stave churches and its actual independence as a structure separate from the Swedish pavilion, the architectural references would not necessarily be apparent to an audience unfamiliar with Norwegian history and architecture. Norway's subjugation to Sweden persists in the representation of the flag and serves as a subtle challenge to Norwegian assertions of independence. However, the flag flown above the actual Norwegian pavilion did not bear the union mark (see fig. 1.5), and thus further encouraged fair attendees to conceive of Norway as a distinct nation. In fact, in 1898 the *Storting*, the Norwegian parliament, approved, for

⁵⁶ "Paris Exposition Ready: Opening Next Saturday of the Greatest Fair Ever Held" *The New York Times* (April 8, 1900): 6.

the third time, a bill providing for a Norwegian flag without the union sign on it, and thus this bill became law without the Swedish-Norwegian king's sanction.⁵⁷ The inclusion of the flag with the union sign in the illustration perhaps indicates the French newspaper's preference for the union. The Swedish-Norwegian king at the time, Oscar II was the grandson of Carl Johan, Napoleon's former Marshall Jean Baptiste Bernadotte and the first monarch of Sweden and Norway, a detail which may have influenced the opinions of those working at the daily Parisian paper.

Despite the representational dissonance of this illustration, it still demonstrates the success of the Norwegian pavilion in aiding the effort to construct visually a narrative of independent identity and history to bolster Norwegian nationhood. Strangely, the perception and representation of Norway as uncultivated and largely rural in fact contrasts sharply with the population statistics of the time. In 1800, the population of Christiania was 12,000, but by the end of the nineteenth century, the year of the illustration, the population of the city had grown to 228,000.⁵⁸ While Norway had experienced a loss to its overall population due to a large-scale emigration to North American, which began around the second quarter of the century, these émigrés were largely rural inhabitants.⁵⁹ The changes in the distribution of the population run contrary to the depiction of Norway as largely agrarian in 1900. The idea of Norway as an unindustrialized nation of peasants, who embodied an enduring legacy of independence, actually reinforced eighteenth-century notions about the importance of the peasant in defining "Norwegian-ness" within Norway. As early as the mid-eighteenth century,

⁵⁷ Popperwell, 137.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 23.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 134.

Erik Pontoppidan, writing about the natural history of Norway (*Norges Naturlige Historie* of 1752) discussed the *bonde*, the Norwegian peasant, as representative of that which is characteristically Norwegian.⁶⁰ The illustration thus demonstrates, in part, the success of Norwegian efforts to manipulate the past and present to construct the peasant as emblematic of “Norwegian-ness”; their historic independence from feudal lords and modern industry making them attractive symbols of nationhood.

Beyond establishing nationhood and national competence in art and industry, international exhibitions with their pavilions and displays also encouraged competition amongst nations. Participation alone did not guarantee the respect of those who viewed the objects displayed. In fact, the appraisals of the audiences and judges regarding the quality of the national products were crucial in maintaining national pride and respect. The French jurors found the historical and national rhetoric the Norwegian pavilion and decorative arts display created enchanting, noting in their assessment of the textiles on display, which included the aforementioned tapestries designed by Munthe, “The textile art in Norway goes back as far in time as the history of the country. The mythic poems and the ancient stories from the history of Norway, called ‘Sagaer,’ testify that the textile art has been practiced from ancient times in Norway.”⁶¹ The “ancient” past that the stave-style architecture referenced along with the themes and stories of Munthe’s tapestries and the medium of tapestry itself convinced the judges that the national products on display did in fact demonstrate the distinct character of Norway as a nation.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 32.

⁶¹ Quoted in Jens Thiis, “The Museum of Applied Art at Trondhjem,” *Museums Journal* (March 1904): 284, reprinted in Jan-Lauritz Opstad, *Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseums Vævscole og Atelier for Kunstvævning 1898-1909* (Trondheim: Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum, 1983).

The jurors' comments also point to the particular success of Munthe's designs and the way in which they reinforced the notion that Norway possessed a collective, unique, and substantial history.

Despite the jurors glowing impression of Norway's decorative arts display of 1900 (fig 1.7), they made sure to reference the shortcomings of Norway's contributions to previous exhibitions, noting:

This nation [Norway], which at the exhibition in 1889 had no product to show connected with ornamental art and decoration, has since that time made a wonderful progress . . . here a nation appears which seems to have passed over the early essays of the period of the beginner, and appears to possess fully a talent which is very original, and the value of which it would be no use denying.⁶²

As a newcomer, Norway's future in the art world remained uncertain and although extensive progress in the arts was noted, the failures of the past remained ever present. At the Parisian exhibitions of 1878 and 1889, the jurors, along with the French art critics, had positioned themselves as the ultimate arbiters of artistic taste. The French jury wanted to maintain their dominant position, and remind all who cared to know that while other nations might make achievements in the art world, those achievements paled in comparison to the efforts of France. Norway, along with its Scandinavian neighbors of Denmark and Sweden received rather unkind reviews after the 1878 Paris World Exposition. Norway fared the worst, with one critic writing, "Art vegetates in

⁶² Quoted in Thiis, 284.

Denmark, lives slightly in Sweden, and doesn't exist at all in Norway.”⁶³ A nation with artists who only had been working for twenty-two years, according to the jury of 1900, could not challenge France's status as a cultured and artistically fertile nation. The comments of the juries and critics emphasize the fact that these international exhibitions served to promote nationality and in doing so, also perpetuated and reinforced stereotypical ideas about different nations.

The displays at these grand exhibitions, in addition to their role in promoting and distinguishing national identities through the presentation of objects, aided in the construction of a subject adept at identifying national distinctions constructed in the carefully organized and orchestrated exhibition. Exhibitions, as Tony Bennett explains in “The Exhibitionary Complex,” are about “spectacle and surveillance.”⁶⁴ One of Bennett's central arguments is that the history of the carceral system overlaps with the history of the exhibition. This argument allows him to connect familiar ideas about power and surveillance to the exhibition, and thus, examine the way in which these two seemingly disparate realms of the prison and the museum are tied together through the relationship between display and power.⁶⁵ Bennett uses Michel Foucault's extensive work on the history of punishment and prisons in order to argue that disciplining happens in a variety of spaces in modern society, including World's Fairs and department stores. Not only do exhibitions create a spectacle through the disciplined

⁶³ Armand Dayot, “Anders Zorn” *L'art et les artistes*, 3 (1906): 43 quoted in Emily Braun, “Scandinavian Painting and the French Critics,” in *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting, 1880-1910*, ed. Kirk Varnedoe (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1982), 67.

⁶⁴ Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex” in *Culture, Power, History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, eds. Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley and Sherry B. Ortner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 128.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 124.

and ordered display of cultures and objects, but they also discipline the viewing audience within a public space. By looking at the ordered exhibition the viewers come to know what discipline is and thus are not only subject to the discipline of the objects on display, but the viewers themselves become objects of power. They learn through looking that they are being viewed, and consequently, that they must regulate themselves accordingly.⁶⁶

Bennet's argument supports my understandings of the Norwegian participation in the World's Fair and the critical reception of the Norwegian display. Even though Sweden still had monarchical control of Norway during the 1900 exhibition, Norway, having learned a few lessons about surveillance from the 1878 and 1889 reviews of their national displays, effectively presented itself as an independent nation through the construction of the separate Norwegian pavilion. Critics therefore responded as though Norway was independent. While the French judges took care in noting the newness of the nation, their response to Norway as a somewhat naïve artistic force was cultivated through the visual presentation of the nation, in contemporary art and architecture, as ancient and rooted in the past. While the French wielded a great deal of power as the host of these fairs, the Norwegian exhibition committee responsible for designing the pavilion took advantage of the critical response that Norway had faced in the past. Using the previous criticisms to their benefit, the Norwegians constructed a pavilion, and thereby a nation, which had the appearance of being new and old at the same time. The Norway that the committee designed and represented through the pavilion's

⁶⁶ Ibid, 126.

architecture and the objects on display thus fulfilled, and simultaneously exceeded, the expectations of those who believed they understood what Norway embodied as a nation. As the French jury made clear in their criticisms of the 1900 display, and in previous years' exhibitions, Norway – and to a lesser degree its Scandinavian neighbors of Sweden and Denmark – was a primitive land, a fact attributable to its long, dark, and frigid winters, the rugged and largely uncultivated landscape, and the people's long practice of paganism.⁶⁷ As early as the mid-eighteenth century, ideas about the relatively uncivilized “northern countries” circulated in France via the writings of a former French tutor of the Danish king Christian VII, M. Mallet. In preparing to write a history of Denmark, Mallet wrote two introductory volumes intended to illuminate aspects of the lives of “Ancient Scandinavians.” Mallet's tomes proved to be of such interest that they were translated into English in 1770, at which time the translator, a Bishop Percy, described the volumes as having merit “which has long been acknowledged in most parts of Europe.”⁶⁸ The revised version of the translated text, published in 1847, includes an editor's preface, in which I.A. Blackwell notes the merits and limitations of Mallet's and Percy's work, and describes his task, noting that he “has necessarily been obliged to revise the work throughout, and omit such portions as were founded on views obviously erroneous, or on authorities which the historical researches

⁶⁷ For specific comments in late nineteenth-century publications see Braun, 67-75. For earlier critiques or “accounts” of the Norwegian way of life, see M. Mallet, Bishop Percy, trans., I. A. Blackwell, ed. *Northern Antiquities; or, An Historical Account of the Manners, Customs, Religioun and Laws, Maritime Expeditions and Discoveries, Language and Literature of the Ancient Scandinavians, (Danes, Swedes, Norwegians and Icelanders.) with Incidental Notices Respecting Our Saxon Ancestors* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1847), 215-216 and 240-243.

⁶⁸ Ibid, “Bishop Percy's Preface.”

of the present age have shown to be fallacious.”⁶⁹ Despite Blackwell’s revisions, in chapter eleven, which addresses the “Arts and Sciences of the Ancient Scandinavians” the description of “The Scandinavians” as having “contempt for the arts” and being possessed of a “rough, fiery, and quarrelsome temper” remains.⁷⁰ The majority of this chapter is dedicated to describing the supposed barbarism of the “ancient” Scandinavians, which he locates in their lack of agriculture, the absence of a “proper” written tradition (more than one page is spent criticizing runes), and their pagan religion.⁷¹ Despite Mallet’s criticisms of the Scandinavians, his language also carries with it a tone of admiration:

It is by mischievous errors of the same kind that all nations have been distinguished in their first ages of simplicity and ignorance; those first ages which prejudice makes us regret, and wish that the arts had never corrupted their primeval innocence. . . . But the extremity of Scandinavia, where that light [of science] has not yet penetrated, still remains faithfully subject to all its ancient errors.⁷²

Mallet’s wistful look at the lost “primeval innocence” of modern nations anticipates later nineteenth-century European attitudes towards the past, people, and traditions supposedly uncorrupted by industry and modernity.

⁶⁹ Ibid, I.A. Blackwell, “Editor’s Preface.”

⁷⁰ Ibid, 215. Mallet, with the support of Percy and Blackwell, goes on at length about the shortcomings of the Scandinavians, see 215-243.

⁷¹ Ibid, 215-224.

⁷² Ibid, 227.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Europeans took a great interest in objects and people that they characterized as “primitive.”⁷³ They sought inspiration, and to some degree salvation, in “the primitive” and hoped that it would allow them to escape the frenetic modern industrialized world which had grown and prospered all too well.⁷⁴ Realizing the power of “the primitive,” Norwegians capitalized on their seemingly isolated existence. Paradoxically, the confirmation and manipulation of a primitive past proved that Norway had in fact become modern. Norwegian nationalists had learned how to utilize the exhibition process and manipulated the historical narrative for their benefit, as evidenced in the pavilion construction as well as the eventual takeover of King Oscar II’s open-air museum by the Norwegian Folk Museum in 1907.

The powerful mechanism of control that is exercised through the exhibition is useful for many reasons. The reason of primary interest here is that the exhibition teaches and civilizes citizens and thus is useful when constructing a nation. The 1900 exhibition provided an opportunity for a select group of Norwegian nationalists to

⁷³ The “primitive” remains a problematic and yet unavoidable concept of nineteenth-century art history. The Oxford English Dictionary’s second numbered definition for “primitive, n. and adj.” is “An original inhabitant, an aboriginal; a person belonging to a preliterate, non-industrial society,” as well as “With *the*. That which is primitive or recalls an early or ancient period; simple, unsophisticated, or crude things or people as a class.” According to the “modern” inhabitants of Europe and America, in the context of the late nineteenth century, a wide variety of people and things could be classed as “primitive.” In addition to its reference to “an early or ancient period,” primitive also was used pejoratively to refer to non-Europeans and/or perceived outsiders, women, children, and people with mental illness as well as the objects and/or artworks they made. Ultimately, a profound feeling of ambivalence lies at the heart of the characterization of “primitive,” an attraction and repulsion that offer insight into the anxieties experienced by those who labeled and classified people and things in this fashion. “primitive, n. and adj.” *OED Online*. June 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.ezp2.lib.umn.edu/view/Entry/151351?redirectedFrom=primitive> (accessed July 29, 2013).

⁷⁴ In terms of the decorative arts, practitioners and proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement such as William Morris and John Ruskin believed in the social benefit of employing time-tested methods of manufacture practiced in the Middle Ages, or early modern period, as a way to resist the degradation of the decorative arts that machine manufacture had facilitated. For more on this, see chapter three.

instruct fellow countrymen in the history of their nation; effectively showing Norwegians how to behave in order to be good citizens and representatives of their nation. Members of a nation need to know their common history and how to comport themselves according to the ordered ideal of the exhibition in order to be good citizens. They need to be able to imagine in their minds what it means to be Norwegian so that the nation can cohere as an idea. The image of national communion, which Anderson describes in his explanation of an imagined community, is an essential component to the structuring of good national citizens. Exhibition displays visually narrated and constructed “Norwegian-ness” which encouraged Norwegian citizens to rely upon objects in order to form a mental image of national communion.⁷⁵

Linked to the civilizing function of ordered displays, and potentially even more significant, is the way in which the exhibition mandates nation formation. In order to participate in the economy of display, particularly World’s Fairs, nationhood was necessary since the basic organizing principle of these grand spectacles was the national origin of the objects. This close relationship between display and the nation is fundamental, as Bennett eloquently observes:

Museums, galleries, and, more intermittently, exhibitions played a pivotal role in the formation of the modern state and are fundamental to its conception as, among other things, a set of educative and civilizing agencies. Since the late nineteenth century, they have been ranked highly in the funding priorities of all developed nation-states and have proved remarkably influential cultural

⁷⁵ Anderson, 6.

technologies in the degree to which they have recruited the interest and participation of their citizenries.⁷⁶

While world's fairs and international expositions ordered and displayed, they were only temporary and their fixed locations limited the audience that could attend. Not everyone could afford to travel to the exhibition if they did not live nearby, and even if the exhibitions received extensive attention in the form of newspaper articles and publications describing the environments created, this would not be the same as participating in the spectacle itself. The museum presented itself as a more permanent and accessible way in which to instruct a local population in how to present itself. However, the locations of these museums, largely in urban areas, indicate that perhaps they were for a particular audience. It is difficult to draw conclusions about the visitors to museums in their early years, nevertheless, it is clear that the precursors to museums, cabinets of curiosity and royal collections, were compiled and kept by and for those with financial means.⁷⁷

The nineteenth century was a time when the doors to museums were opened to the general public, frequently in the belief that the experience of the museum had social benefits.⁷⁸ These publics proved essential to the display of power that the museum presented. It is not a coincidence or mere development in museum practice that resulted in this change, but rather as Bennett argues, a calculated effort to take subjects and turn

⁷⁶ Bennett, 129.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 123.

⁷⁸ For example, the Museum of Manufactures or South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert) in London.

them into objects who then subject themselves to surveillance and regulation.⁷⁹ Norway was one of the nations that participated in the culture of display through the establishment of museums and participation in exhibitions. However, Norwegian nationalists found that certain types of museums and exhibitions, those that highlighted domestic decorative arts, most effectively crafted and defined the nation that they hoped to represent. The Norwegian displays in museums and at world's fairs offered a narrative of Norwegian history, a narrative told at the Norwegian Folk Museum as well as through the displays of the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design in Oslo, that allowed Norway to participate as a nation that was old, and yet new again.

Museums as Miniature Construction Sites

Folk museums and decorative arts museums commonly offer a vision of the past and the present that draws a sharp distinction between the two, emphasizing the present as a moment of perfection, the teleological culmination of all the events of the past. However, the perfection of the present is never and always achieved. The nation can never achieve a state of perfection because it always is changing, and despite efforts to monitor and measure these changes, they quickly become part of the past. However, in living history museums, the past becomes the present. Directors and curators can manipulate and manage representations of the past, which offer the visitor a living example that supposedly simulates what life was like, simultaneously demonstrating the

⁷⁹ Bennett, 123.

progress that has been made in order to achieve the lifestyle to which the visitor is accustomed. These representations of the past make the present of the visitor appear even more perfect than the past-present. These types of sites or institutions produce a progressive narrative of national history, establishing the present as the desired and always already prime state of the nation's development and modernity.⁸⁰

There is a wealth of literature addressing the goals and functions of contemporary folk museums and historic sites. The majority of the scholars who research and write about these institutions, such as Jay Anderson, Louis C. Jones and Candace T. Matelic, are convinced of the positive contributions that such institutions make to museum culture, education, and history. While these authors are concerned chiefly with folk museums and living historical sites that feature interpreters (people in period costumes who pretend to be contemporaries of the site during a certain historical moment, and who often perform dramatic and pedagogical roles) and are located in the United States, their arguments translate well to a discussion of the Norwegian Folk Museum and the *Oslo Kunstindustrimuseet* (Museum of Decorative Arts and Design in Oslo). The application of their discussion of American museums to Norwegian institutions is a reversal of a common practice in the museum literature. Jones, Matelic and Anderson, among others, cite Scandinavians as pioneers in the field of the living history museum, especially the open-air museum, and are particularly full of praise for the Swede Arthur Hazelius (founder of the open-air *Nordiska Museet* in Skansen,

⁸⁰ Here, I am indebted to Scott Magelssen's critique of the narrative of the development of the living history museum that museum officials and critics offer in order to understand the present state of such institutions. For more on this, see his book *Living History Museums: Undoing History Through Performance* (Lanham, MD; Toronto; Plymouth, UK: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007).

Sweden), noting that his work provides (or should) the inspiration, if not the blue-print, for American museums.

Reconsidering and expanding upon theories of folk museums from the 1950s, Jones and Matelic, assert “one could argue that folklife research is as significant as straight academic history (if not more so) in portraying a realistic picture of everyday life.”⁸¹ Their understanding of folklife research is based upon the assumption that it is concerned necessarily with the ordinary or quotidian. In their collaborative essay, they address the problem of invention as it relates to living history and folk museums that feature reconstructions or reenactments, noting “In the absence of a solid research base, the old soon merges with the new, and who knows what is really appropriate for the time period?”⁸² Their concern with what is appropriate or accurate to a specific time comes from their belief that folk museums can and should give the visitor an impression of the everyday existence of people who lived in the past.

In order to promote folk research as an academic discipline, Jones and Matelic attempt to show their concern with having rigorous standards in their field. However, the emphasis that they place on everyday and traditional activities presents a problem. Often what is known of the “everyday” comes to historians and researchers through materials that have survived over decades and centuries. These letters, diaries and other such documents survive simply because someone decided they were worth saving. Therefore, only a select part of the everyday can ever be known to historians or folklife

⁸¹ Louis C. Jones and Candace T. Matelic, “Folklife and museums: how far have we come since the 1950s?” in *Folklife and Museums*, Patricia Hall and Charlie Seeman eds. (Nashville, American Association for State and Local History, 1987), 6.

⁸² *Ibid.*

researchers, and the rest of the picture that they reconstruct is in fact invented.⁸³ This does not negate the importance of the work performed in these museums, however, it does indicate that there is a need to reevaluate the way in which these museums are understood to operate. As Eric Hobsbawm rightly notes in *The Invention of Tradition*, there are benefits to be derived from the study of such inventions, and therefore, curators' and interpreters' inventions should not be viewed entirely with contempt or disdain.⁸⁴

Despite the problems inherent in the effort towards authenticity and rigorous historical accuracy, folklorist Jay Anderson echoes the belief Jones and Matelic express, arguing, in his book *Time Machines*, that folk museums and “living” historical sites are contemporary time machines.⁸⁵ These immersive experiences allow visitors to travel back in time to experience daily life or a particular historical event. He recognizes that the view of history offered is not accurate, in that it cannot simulate a specific history, and, yet, he concludes that these sites give useful representations of historical theories and interpretations of life in the past.⁸⁶ While Anderson has a more realistic view of the potential such historical sites offer, he is not critical of the key problems that these sites present.

⁸³ Magelssen, 1.

⁸⁴ See Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions” in *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 12-13.

⁸⁵ I have placed *living* in quotation marks to note the assumption that Anderson makes in using this descriptor for the types of museums and sites he studies. His use of the word living implies that other history museums and historical sites without interpreters or reenactments are not living, whether that means dead or simply inanimate.

⁸⁶ Jay Anderson, *Time Machines: The World of Living History* (Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1984), 43.

One of these problems, which Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discusses in her examination of ethnographic displays specifically and museum exhibitions more broadly, is the creation of the spectacle out of the everyday. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett critiques the dramatization of the quotidian and the idea (or error) that “one man’s life is another man’s spectacle” arguing that “exhibitions institutionalize this error by producing the quotidian as spectacle, and they do this by building the role for the observer into the structure of events that, left to their own devices, are not subject to formal viewing.”⁸⁷ In constructing a place for the “participant-observer” open-air performances of the everyday acknowledge what is happening as performance, and the players comport themselves as if they are being watched. Moreover, the practices as performed are relegated to the past, to history, a process Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes as “archaizing,” a mode of cultural production in which “the repudiated is transvalued as heritage.”⁸⁸ Cultural practices, seemingly lost, regain value through being represented and constructed as heritage, however, heritage is produced in the present.⁸⁹ The desire for the type of performance that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett critiques stems from the nation’s reliance on visual display.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, these visual displays have the potential to romanticize everyday life. Anderson acknowledges this problem,

⁸⁷ See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 47.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁸⁹ K-G gives an extensive definition of heritage in her book, see 149-150. Of particular interest here is the idea that heritage is the revaluation of negated cultural practices. Heritage produces culture through its “recuperation” – conservation, preservation, restoration – of something that is constructed as being lost and/or in need of saving.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 32. Her specific assertion that “The increasing emphasis on ostension – on showing – during the nineteenth century suggests a shift in the foundation of authoritative knowledge from a reliance primarily on rhetoric to an emphasis on information particularly in the form of visual facts” is particularly apt for this part of my argument.

although, exactly how he believes it can be combatted remains unclear. The idealization of life in the past creates nostalgia for what appears to be a “simpler” time, when in fact that “time” never existed or only seems romantic because it does not have to be lived.

Nostalgia is a longing for that which does not, and did not, exist; as Susan Stewart eloquently explains, “Nostalgia is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience. Rather, it remains behind and before that experience.”⁹¹ Stewart’s conceptualization of nostalgia in relation to narratives of the past works particularly well in the context of examining the narratives created in living history museums and through writings, such as Anderson’s, that deal with such institutions. Despite the label of “living” that is used to describe historical institutions that feature interpreters, these sites have little to do with actual lived experiences.

Museums and living historical sites are analogous to the nation; all three are manufactured in order to fulfill a particular need. They also rely upon one another to bolster their legitimacy. In Norway, during the nineteenth century, folk and decorative arts museums,⁹² which displayed Norwegian objects and produced Norwegian heritage, constructed a national narrative in order to prove that Norway deserved recognition as an independent nation. By circular logic, Norwegian nationalism is what led to the founding of museums and historical sites, which supposedly demonstrate the inherently

⁹¹ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir and the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 23.

⁹² For example, the Norwegian Folk Museum (*Norsk Folkemuseum*) in Oslo was founded in 1894, The Decorative Arts and Design Museum (*Kunstindustrimuseet*) in Oslo was founded in 1876, and the National Museum of Decorative Arts (*Nordenfjelske Kunstindustrimuseum*) in Trondheim was founded in 1893. For more, see Erling Welle-Strand, *Museums in Norway* (Oslo: The Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1974).

unique character of Norway. Museum scholar Erling Welle-Strand carefully points out the special role that museums play in Norwegian culture and history:

Museums are distributed over the whole country, and their individual scope and aims vary considerably. . . . But most of our cultural museums belong to a type which is rare outside Scandinavia: These are the folk museums, or open-air museums, whose purpose is to give an idea of life as it was lived in the past. . . . Museum policy now aims at stressing the importance of specialization among the folk museums, so that each shall as far as possible interpret the cultural character of its own particular locality.⁹³

His understanding of these institutions is subtly different from those of scholars such as Anderson. Significantly, Welle-Strand recognizes that the purpose is to give “an idea” of life, not a re-creation. He also acknowledges, through his use of the word “interpret” that the culture and life represented is in fact a mediated experience. These distinctions between his understanding and that of someone such as Anderson bring to mind the “lack of object” that Stewart emphasizes in her definition of nostalgia. These historical institutions interpret and represent the past in order to teach Norwegians how to be Norwegian. However, a representation is not the object, in fact it draws attention to the fact that what is represented is in fact absent, and this lack of object is precisely what leads to nostalgia, which the nation depends on these institutions to create.⁹⁴ Without

⁹³ Welle-Strand, 4.

⁹⁴ Patricia Hall confronts this matter slightly differently arguing “It is foolish to assume that the museum, with all its files and fieldwork, shows the public what the past was *really* like. Museums represent, but it is a slanted vision based on foggy diaries, spotty records, excavated shards, scholarly biases, and research dilemmas incapable of solution.” Patricia Hall, “Applying Theory to Practice: Folklife and Today's

nostalgia for the national past that these institutions manufacture the nation loses some of its power to instruct its citizenry in how to behave; therefore the museums that construct national character through displays and interpreter re-enactments rely upon the nation for their existence and relevance. Likewise, nations rely upon museums to create an historical base that demonstrates that the people who make up the nation share experiences and traditions.

Carol Duncan, in her critical examinations of museums, similarly argues that museums play a role in manufacturing the nation one citizen at a time:

In the museum, th[e]citizen finds a culture that unites him with other French citizens regardless of their individual social position. He also encounters there the state itself, embodied in the very form of the museum. Acting on behalf of the public, it stands revealed as keeper of the nation's spiritual life and guardian of the most evolved and civilized culture of which the human spirit is capable."⁹⁵

While Duncan focuses on the French nation, her argument translates well to Norway. Museums not only construct and unite individual citizens, but also offer themselves as institutions that add value to public life. As such, museums do not present themselves as creators of the nation, but rather as magnanimous “keepers,” and “guardians” of all that can be and is worthy of preservation. Moreover, as Duncan explains, “Through most of the nineteenth century, an international museum culture remained firmly committed to the idea that the first responsibility of a public art museum is to enlighten and improve

History Museums” in *Folklife and Museums*, eds. Patricia Hall and Charlie Seeman (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1987), 45.

⁹⁵ Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995), 26.

its visitors morally, socially, and politically.”⁹⁶ Part of the social and political enlightenment process included the instruction and construction of citizens through the presentation of a national historical narrative. In Norway, the narrative depended heavily on the imagined continuity of rural life and the stalwart character of the peasant. In order to educate Norwegians, and more specifically those in urban areas, about the Norwegian farmer, the Decorative Arts and Design Museum in Oslo and the Norwegian Folk Museum displayed examples of rural material culture and built a narrative that told of the admirable, hard-working peasant with a rustic and naïve talent for the decorative.⁹⁷ Indeed both institutions, along with other national organizations, such as *Den Norske Husflidsforening* (the Norwegian Home Craft Association), promoted the notion that crafts such as weaving, woodcarving and painting furniture, which rural dwellers in Norway had practiced for centuries, were uniquely representative of the Norwegian nation and demonstrative of a decorative arts tradition.⁹⁸

Munthe promoted this narrative through his curatorial work at the Decorative Arts and Design Museum in Oslo. As a board member and decorative artist, Munthe designed and installed the galleries featuring the Museum’s collection of Old Norwegian folk art (fig. 1.9). In addition to his curation of the folk art galleries, Munthe also designed the decoration for two adjacent galleries designated for the display of

⁹⁶ Duncan, 16.

⁹⁷ Patricia G. Berman, “Norwegian Craft Theory and National Revival in the 1890s” in *Art and the National Dream: the Search for Vernacular Expression in Turn-of-the-Century Design* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1993), 161.

⁹⁸ Den Norske Husflidsforening (established in 1891) promoted these “national” crafts, and the Norwegian-born artists Frida Hansen (1855-1931) and Gerhard Munthe promoted the production of textiles locally. See Berman, 160.

pictorial weavings.⁹⁹ The installation of the folk art included tapestries and woodcarvings as well as household objects arranged in a manner similar to the Trondheim Museum display at the Paris 1900 exhibition (fig. 1.7). The tapestries are hung on the wall of a long corridor while decorative objects are displayed in vitrines and installed on open shelves. Munthe's display, in which the tapestries hang side-by-side and one on top of the other, creates a patchwork of geometric patterns that are framed by a decorative frieze and pilasters. The artist's installation of the folk art collection demonstrates his knowledge of and familiarity with these objects as well as his understanding that the display of objects remained central to the production and comprehension of the Norwegian nation. In using his designs as a framing device that surrounds and helps organize the "Old Norwegian folk art," Munthe presents his work as part of a historical narrative; he offers his designs as a continuation of the history of decorative arts, craftwork, and design in Norway. The use of his biomorphic designs to frame the patchwork walls covered with geometric tapestries serves to produce Norwegian heritage, the new (Munthe's decorative borders) draws attention to the folk tapestries' repetitive geometry and in so doing subtly manufactures Norwegian heritage.

The emphasis on creating a continuous narrative via craft and design traditions in Norway during the nineteenth century helped construct the image of the nation and define national identity. In terms of the nation, traditions, as Hobsbawm describes them, fit nicely into the category of shared experience: "The object and characteristic of 'traditions,' including invented ones, is invariance. The past, real or invented, to which

⁹⁹ Deneksen, 195-196.

they refer imposes fixed (normally formalized) practices, such as repetition.”¹⁰⁰ When one performs or participates in a tradition, he or she is part of a community of people which includes those who have performed the tradition in the past and will perform it in the future. Unfortunately, Hobsbawm glosses over the significance of invariance and repetition, instead choosing to focus on locating the characteristics that distinguish “old” and “invented” traditions. Such an effort seems unnecessary when the concepts of invariance and repetition already have presented a dilemma to examine. It is impossible for there to be invariance in repetition, and each performance of the tradition ultimately will vary, thus disrupting the definition Hobsbawm offers. Nevertheless, his assertion that “[Traditions] are highly relevant to that comparatively recent historical innovation, the ‘nation’, with its associated phenomena: nationalism, the nation-state, national symbols, histories and the rest” remains useful.¹⁰¹ The emphasis on the native Norwegian tradition of decorative arts, exemplified in Munthe’s installation at the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design as well as the repeated performance of other types of traditions, such as the making of lefse, at the Norwegian Folk Museum, encourages visitors to imagine themselves as members of a larger community, and situates them along an historical timeline. Scott Magelssen discusses the role of traditions in constructing an historical narrative, arguing “By locating ‘traditions’ in the present while referencing the past, living history museums project an environment backward, down the continuum of instants, to become the kernel of the present status

¹⁰⁰ Hobsbawm, 2.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 13.

quo.”¹⁰² At the Norwegian Folk Museum, common and quotidian tasks, including lefse-making, caring for animals, and farm life more broadly, projected as traditional through the interpreter demonstrations serve to construct a national narrative of a shared history. History is an integral part of the nation, as Renan and Munthe noted, and a common history that could tie a large population together with the belief that it had shared experiences proved to be a powerful tool that museums and historical sites used to craft a national history in the nineteenth century.

Munthe, working in tandem with the Folk Museum and Decorative Arts and Design Museum, highlighted the craft techniques practiced in Norway during the nation’s early history (the history written by P. A. Munch). In her exploration of the Norwegian nationalist interest in craft in the late nineteenth century, Patricia Berman notes that Munthe latched onto the notions of “the humble and the homespun” and for him these characteristics described Norwegian peasants as well as their craft techniques and material products. Munthe longed for the “humble and homespun” in the face of bourgeois efforts to be “progressive and cultured,” which he believed had led the urban middle class to have diminished respect for local crafts.¹⁰³ As Berman argues, Munthe and those of his ilk believed in the need to “redirect the urban middle class to consider the genuine and humble manifestations of a true Norwegian spirit. In other words, it was through the peasantry that the urban middle class could seek its identity.”¹⁰⁴

Unfortunately, Munthe conveniently overlooked the fact that the peasant population’s persistent production of “folk art” was not indicative of a Norwegian instinct, gift, or

¹⁰² Magelssen, 41.

¹⁰³ Berman, 156.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 158.

tendency for the decorative, but rather was based on the frequent deprivations of farm life and the need for additional income.¹⁰⁵ In avoiding the harsh realities of rural life, bourgeois nationalists could continue to celebrate the Norwegian peasant's craftwork as an ideal symbol of national character.

The idealization of rural life and craft practices at the open-air Norwegian Folk Museum, while creating a cohesive and idyllic narrative of a humble, hard-working nation of farm laborers, functioned as an "urban theme park" as well as an example of "simple rustic life" allowing the urban middle and upper classes a chance to see and enjoy the pleasures rural life had to offer without the hardships.¹⁰⁶ The histories that museums like the Norwegian Folk Museum present are tied to Stewart's understanding of nostalgia and its relationship to the miniature, "The miniature, linked to nostalgic versions of childhood and history, presents a diminutive, and thereby manipulable, version of experience, a version which is domesticated and protected from contamination."¹⁰⁷ The space of the living history museum is managed and contained. Despite the seeming "open-air" quality of these museums, there are definitive borders that contain the openness of these spaces; and they present history as distinct, and separate from contemporary life. Visiting these living history sites permits an encounter with the unknown, the past, but a specific past that serves to stabilize the idea of the nation and to provide an authenticity and coherence to national history.¹⁰⁸ These "miniature" representations of the nation are designed to promote the idea of a unified

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 162.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 161.

¹⁰⁷ Stewart, 69.

¹⁰⁸ Magelssen, 60. In his book, Magelssen discusses the role of living history museums in the United States after McCarthy-ism, during the Cold War, however his argument still is useful here.

national identity – based on a shared heritage – which is crucial to the project of nationalism. However, as Stewart argues, the miniature is a cultural product, and in the case of open-air museums, there is a manipulation and miniaturizing of the nation.¹⁰⁹ The nation is made small, knowable, comprehensive and continuous for the visitor. At the Norwegian Folk Museum, peasant life and culture are manipulated and miniaturized, contained within the Bygdøy peninsula, rather than spread over the expanse of the Norwegian countryside, and made easily knowable through a simple day trip outside the city, rather than by way of actual lived experience and the performance of farm labors.

There are seemingly no inconsistencies in the history that is told there, everything is carefully crafted to create a small, perfect whole. The perfection enchants the visitor and shows him or her the ideal way to live. Patricia Hall concedes this point, and argues that “It is foolish to assume that the museum, with all its files and fieldwork, shows the public what the past was *really* like. Museums represent, but it is a slanted vision based on foggy diaries, spotty records, excavated shards, scholarly biases, and research dilemmas incapable of solution.”¹¹⁰ Despite her assertion, it is all too easy for visitors to assume that living historical sites and museums do show what the past is *really* like as the visitor is not privy to the fragmented nature of the material that scholars and museums professionals utilize in their creation of exhibitions and historical re-creations. Yet, the perfection of these contained museum and historical environments gives away the fact that calculated human labor went into their construction. Stewart

¹⁰⁹ Stewart, 55.

¹¹⁰ Hall, 45.

emphasizes the influence of culture, asserting “There are no miniatures in nature; the miniature is a cultural product, the product of an eye performing certain operations, manipulating, and attending in certain ways to, the physical world.”¹¹¹

The apt comparison that Stewart makes between the miniature world of the dollhouse and the idealized environment of living history museums is useful beyond an examination of the histories that these sites represent. The perfect dollhouse is full of miniature furniture, dishes, and home accessories, to make it appear as though a tiny family could dwell inside its diminutive rooms. Much like a dollhouse, folk museums contain the possessions of everyday people, and the settings are imagined and idealized (figs. 1.4, 1.10-1.11). The tiny rooms of dollhouses are uninhabitable as are the staged homes and buildings of folk museums; no one can actually live or work in these spaces because use of the space diminishes its perfection.

The carefully curated interior of the Hove house at the Norwegian Folk Museum, situated near the stave church from Gol, is full of furniture and utilitarian objects. Despite the fact that the objects shown were sent with the house, the profusion of objects on display overwhelms the interior. Two rows of plates line the top of the back wall, and additional serving pieces hang on the wall between the windows. The long wooden table in the center of the room is laid with a number of objects, including candlesticks, and an assortment of bowls and steins. The woman’s costume displayed at the far left, on what appears to be a dress form, further evidences the staging of this scene for easy visual consumption. The presentation forgets the labor, commotion, and

¹¹¹ Stewart, 55.

mess of everyday life and instead displays objects for the urban Norwegian tourist. The ability to forget, well-inculcated in a good national citizen, contributes to the perfection and visitor idealization of museums and historical sites.

Although Hove house and the Folk Museum more generally work to create a narrative of historical continuity, part of that historical narrative involves forgetting. It is not just the forgetting of the nuance of everyday life, but in fact the shared forgetting of historical inconsistencies in the crafting of national identity which needs consideration. As already noted, Renan argues that forgetting plays a crucial role in the maintenance of a nation, which he believes results in the greater good. Anderson challenges Renan's proposition about forgetting, and argues instead that people do not forget historical traumas, but rather forget that they, personally, did not live through them, and that those events do not bind them together. Stewart, on the other hand, addresses the particular purpose of forgetting within the living museum context, arguing "For the function of the miniature here is to bring historical events 'to life,' to immediacy, and thereby to erase their history, to lose us within their presentness."¹¹² The Norwegian nation and its history are made small and comprehensible through the piecing together of buildings originating in diverse parts of the country and brought together at Bygdøy. Rather than allowing the visitor to travel back in time, these museums bring an imagined history into the present of the visitor. These sites encourage visitors to forget that the buildings and objects have continued to exist over time and do exist in the contemporary moment. The miniature in this context serves to create

¹¹² Ibid, 60.

distance and only allow for an imagining of the historical moments in which the buildings and objects were built or made, the *then* that is experienced remains separate and distinct from the *now*.

The assembled collections of the Norwegian Folk Museum offer an example of this erasure of history. As noted, in 1881, King Oscar II began a project to relocate five buildings, including the stave church from Gol and the Hove house to Bygdøy. The king began his project over ten years before Aall founded the Folk Museum. King Oscar II's installation of the five buildings signals his recognition of the fragility of his political position as well as his understanding of the role exhibitions played in the construction of national identity. He strategically financed the relocation of the buildings in an effort to demonstrate his interest in Norway, and thus reinforce his legitimacy as a monarch of the Norwegian nation.¹¹³ Situating these historic buildings near the urban center of the country, and allowing urbanites to visit and surround themselves with implements their fellow countrymen used in their shared past does not, however, seem to have garnered him the legitimacy he desired. Unfortunately for the king, the history erased in the experience of these buildings was the history which included the king's sovereignty over Norway. His effort to capitalize on the relationship between national identity and history furthered the project of independence he had hoped to thwart and undermined his position as the monarch. With the official declaration of Norwegian independence in 1905, it would appear that Aall's museum, which emphasized the timelessness of rural life, successfully co-opted the king's effort. Two years after the declaration of Norway's

¹¹³ "Oscar II's Collection" Norsk Folkemuseum Oslo website <http://www.norskfolkemuseum.no/en/Exhibits/The-Open-Air-Museum/Oscar-IIs-Collection/> (accessed 10 August 2012).

independence, in 1907, the folk museum officially absorbed the deposed king's collection.

The Swedish approach to the “open-air” museum, which Hazelius set forth at Skansen (opened in 1881, and perhaps King Oscar II's inspiration for his efforts at Bygdøy), often receives praise from scholars who are fond of Hazelius' mantra “know yourself by knowing the past.”¹¹⁴ Hazelius' refrain emphasizes the knowledge that is to be gained through the past, and establishes an historical continuity based on the belief that people are connected to events that happened before they existed. When crafting a national history, continuity within that history creates an enduring sense of national identity. While Hazelius concerned himself with the open-air museum, his ideas regarding the role of the past, as well as the image of historical continuity projected at the Norwegian Folk Museum are reiterated by Jens Thiis. In a lecture given at a Scottish conference, Thiis, an art historian and the director of the Museum of Applied Art in Trondheim (*Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum*) at the turn of the nineteenth century, stresses national continuity throughout his talk and observes of Norwegians, “A peculiar feature of our people, we appreciate ourselves. This people of peasants have always been a socially free people, even in times of political dependence.”¹¹⁵ Later in his speech, Thiis observes that the present (1903) remains the high point of Norway's history and a time of national strength, revitalization and rejuvenation, observations that reinforce the progressive historical trajectory of the Norwegian nation. He also discusses the museum's efforts to bring national popular art to the people, particularly

¹¹⁴ Jay Anderson, 17-22.

¹¹⁵ Thiis, 281.

the peasantry, in order to educate them about their nation.¹¹⁶ Through these statements, This attests to the facts that civilizing the populace, creating a sense of historical continuity and thus, constructing and promoting the nation are the key goals of his museum, and others of a similar ilk.

The progressive trajectory of Norway's history that the National Museum of Decorative Arts, the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design, and the Folk Museum promulgated created Norwegian heritage and traditions and assigned them to the Norwegian peasant. The image of the peasant as emblematic of Norway provided historical continuity for the nation as well as a source of naïve inspiration for modern artists, such as Munthe, to draw on in the production of national artworks.

The Proximity of Decorative Art

The category "decorative art" encompasses a wide array of objects designed and crafted for beauty and, often, a quotidian functionality as well.¹¹⁷ Decorative art

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 281-82. Of particular interest is the following statement: "Our programme of working contains several items. Among these, I beg to mention the trial which we have repeatedly made during the last few years to bring the museum's collections of national popular art out to the peasants in remote valleys, where impressions of it otherwise cannot reach. Every year we arrange such ambulatory expositions, which are accompanied by lectures on domestic industry. I try to give them an idea what domestic industry was, and what it might become again, if they earnestly took up the work economically and with culture."

¹¹⁷ The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms' definition for "decorative art" reads "Art that is used to decorate or embellish an object that has a practical purpose, as opposed to fine art, which exists as an end in itself." Vaguely corroborating this specified definition, the OED defines "decorative" as "having the function of decorating." While these definitions are adequate, they give the impression that decoration or embellishment is somehow separate from the practical object. Such a separation does not occur as inherently as the definition implies, in fact, decoration is often tied into the functionality or practicality of an object.

Also, my use of the word "beauty" creates a standing problem in that not all can agree on what is beautiful. However, varying perceptions of beauty are precisely what lead to the continued and diverse

objects, as I have broadly defined them, maintain a closeness to people. They are in homes, workplaces, and stores, and they can be touched, handled and brought within the personal space of the body. While these objects vary wildly in monetary and use value, the proximity that they offer is two-fold. They can be brought close to the body, giving a sense of familiarity and comfort, and they also can bring that body close to other bodies that have touched and used the objects. These levels of proximity are crucial in understanding the uses of decorative art objects within living history and decorative arts museums and international exhibitions. Moreover, the intimate relationships that these objects in these environments create serve to further the goals of nationalism.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word proximity has two meanings, the first being “The fact or condition of being near or close in abstract relations, as kinship (esp. in *proximity of blood*), time, nature, etc.; closeness.” The second meaning, now the dominant sense for the word, is “The fact, condition, or position of being near or close by in space; nearness.” These two senses of the word directly correspond to the ways in which decorative art objects craft relationships through time and across space. In examining the way in which Norwegian museums and exhibition displays sought to represent Norway as a nation, it becomes clear that decorative arts played a prominent role in producing the Norwegian national narrative – a narrative that encouraged citizens to see themselves as part of cohesive community, perhaps even an extended family, that deserved and needed to be independent, protected, and perpetuated.

production of decorative art. It is not a discussion of aesthetics that is of interest here, rather the differing ideas of beauty that allow for a definition of decorative art that caters to varying understandings of what beauty might signify. With these multiple understandings in mind, decorative art is intended to beautify an environment while also encouraging quotidian activities: providing a surface upon which to write, a place to sit, illumination when it is dark.

Hazelius' mantra about the past is particularly useful to think of in relation to decorative arts; items that have been in the homes of other people and that seemingly come from or represent another time appear to offer the possibility of knowing the past, through closeness and nearness. Hall labels the idea of knowledge through proximity "contagious magic," which she explains as "objects and locations that were once in contact with someone special have the power to impart some of their specialness to a visitor or observer."¹¹⁸ What exactly Hall means when using the word "specialness" is unclear; however, this ambiguity allows for the interpretation that the "specialness" of the object is in fact the close encounter it brings with history. While the belief in the magical power of objects is unconventional and requires a leap of faith, it should not be eschewed entirely. In fact, art history depends largely upon the belief that objects should be read for the stories that they can tell.

The continued prominence of the national story told via nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Norwegian national displays, including the presentation of Norwegian life at the Norwegian Folk Museum, the architecture of Norway's Paris 1900 pavilion, and the folk art display at the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design, demonstrates the significance of exhibitions and the role of decorative art in constructing a Norwegian national identity. Circling back to the epigraph that opens this chapter, it becomes apparent that the genius of the Norwegian nation, as demonstrated in these exhibitions and displays, was not the enduring and naïve genius of the peasant, but rather the calculated machinations involved in bourgeois nationalists' historical

¹¹⁸ Hall, 84-5.

manipulations of peasant life and culture that produced a genealogical narrative of Norwegian nationhood.



Fig. 1.1 The Numedal Farmstead at the Norwegian Folk Museum (Photo courtesy of the Norsk Folkemuseum)



Fig. 1.2 The Telemark Farmstead at the Norwegian Folk Museum (Photo courtesy of the Norsk Folkemuseum and Anne-Lise Reinsfelt)



Fig. 1.3 The Stave Church from Gol in the Collections of King Oscar II at the Norwegian Folk Museum, Axel Lindahl, 1885-90



Fig. 1.4 The Stave Church from Gol completed on Bygdøy in the summer of 1885, Axel Lindahl, 1885-1890



Fig. 1.5 Paris Exposition: Norwegian Pavilion, Paris, France, 1900, [*Pavilion de la Norvège*. Western portion of the Quai des Nations.]



Fig. 1.6 *The Stave Church at Gol in Hallingdal*, Hans Gude, 1846



Fig. 1.7 Photograph of the exhibit of the National Museum of Decorative Arts in Trondheim (*Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum*) at the Paris Exposition 1900



Fig. 1.8 *The Norwegian Pavilion at the Universal Exhibition of 1900, Paris, illustration from *Le Petit Journal, supplement illustre*, 13 May 1900.*



Fig. 1.9 Photograph of the collection of Old Norwegian Folk Art at the Decorative Arts and Design Museum in Kristiania, installation of hall by Gerhard Munthe, from *Dekorative Kunst* vol 13.issue 5 (February 1905): 194.



Fig. 1.10 View of King Oscar II's Collection at the open-air museum of the Norwegian Folk Museum, Axel Lindahl, 1885-90



Fig. 1.11 Interior of house on the left in fig. 1.9. Hove House, relocated to Bygdøy 1881, Axel Lindahl, 1885-90

Chapter Two

Weaving the Story: Imagining and Re-imagining the Nation

“Nothing contributes more to a sense of national identity than a shared language and history. An important element in the interest in folklore has to do with the creation of a national written language, partly because it was thought that folklore materials contained survivals of older language forms.”¹¹⁹

Brynjulf Alver

Nineteenth-century and contemporary art critics and historians, such as Karl V. Hammer and Widar Halén, have commented on the uniquely Norwegian national character of Gerhard Munthe’s tapestry designs, and the artist himself extolled the national in art asserting “the most exceptional and strongest art has arisen as the expression of one nation’s distinctive view of things as compared to that of another.”¹²⁰ Both Hammer and Halén locate the tapestries’ Norwegian character in their relationship to the *bonde* or Norwegian peasant. In an 1896 article for *The Studio*, Hammer describes the development of Munthe as a decorative artist, observing:

¹¹⁹ Brynjulf Alver, “Folklore and National Identity,” *Nordic Folklore: Recent Studies* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1989), 19.

¹²⁰ Gerhard Munthe, Marion Nelson trans., “Kunstværdier” from *Minder og Meninger* (Kristiania: Albert Cammermeyers Forlag, 1919), available at The Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum Library. See also Karl V. Hammer, “Gerhard Munthe, Decorative Artist,” *The Studio* v8 (1896): 221-223, Widar Halén, “Gerhard Munthe: a Norwegian Pioneer in the Decorative Arts,” *Apollo* 151.459 (2000): 11-18, and “Gerhard Munthe and ‘The movement that from Japan is moving across Europe now,’” *Scandinavian Journal of Design History* v4 (1994): 27-47, and Gerhard Munthe, *Minder og Meninger* (Kristiania: Albert Cammermeyers Forlag, 1919).

He has studied carved work and sculpture in old churches and dwellings, the old poetry of the Sagas, folklore and melodies, the old art of tapestry, the floral painting of *the peasantry and everything connected with the art of that portion of the population.*¹²¹ (emphasis added)

Over a hundred years later, Widar Halén expresses an expanded yet similar understanding of the tapestries, asserting:

In overall effect, the uniqueness of Munthe's work lay in his ability to combine these influences [the Arts and Crafts movement, the Aesthetic movement, Japonisme, and Art Nouveau] with a distillation of Norwegianness, in tune with the national romantic movement and the drive to preserve a rapidly disappearing folk art and culture.¹²²

While Halén provides a broader European context for Munthe's design work, his discussion in relation to national romanticism skips over the way in which Munthe did not so much strive "to preserve a rapidly disappearing folk art and culture" as he sought to represent that art and culture as "disappearing" or as relegated to the past, and thus a valuable source of "primitive" inspiration for the modern artist. Although Halén mentions and explores in depth what he refers to as "foreign influences," he still finds that the inherent Norwegian character of the tapestries comes from close ties to Norwegian folk culture.¹²³ The discourse of both authors rehearses the nineteenth-century Norwegian nationalists' construction of the peasant as emblematic of Norwegian national identity through supposed ties to Norway's storied past.

¹²¹ Hammer, 222.

¹²² Halén, "Gerhard Munthe: a Norwegian Pioneer in the Decorative Arts," 18.

¹²³ Ibid., 12 and 18

Despite the understanding of Munthe's tapestries as representative of Norwegian national identity, the tapestries resist this characterization; in part because folktales, weaving techniques and colors simply cannot equate with a distinct "Norwegian-ness." Although the tapestries trouble the image of Norwegian national identity, they simultaneously bring to light the difficulties that Norway faced during the nineteenth century, a century in which international exhibitions highlighted the innovations and progress of individual nations in terms of art and industry. Norway, as a country long subjected to rule by neighboring nations, did not experience industrialization in the same fashion as its near neighbors, including Denmark, Sweden, and Britain. In fact, at the dawn of the nineteenth century, Norway lacked domestic transportation networks, interconnected local industry, and even a national bank.¹²⁴ Norway's comparatively slower industrialization and self-supplying economy made it easy for nationalists to construct a national narrative around an imagining of peasant life and culture.

Munthe's tapestries demonstrate the complicated construction of Norway as a modern nation through an appropriation and adaptation of the notion of genealogical nationhood by way of an identification with the "primitive" peasant. The tapestries materialize the desire to create a national past and identity, a desire manifest in the efforts to produce heritage that other nineteenth-century nationalists, including the historian Peter Andreas Munch (Edvard Munch's uncle), folklorists Magnus Landstad, Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe, and philologist Ivar Aasen, pursued. Each of these individuals relied on the image of the robust, hard-working, somewhat naïve, and

¹²⁴ Ronald Popperwell, *Norway* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 197), 35-6.

steadfast peasant to carry the burden of Norway's history and modern national identity. The writing of history, documenting of folklore, and production of language come together in Munthe's folktale tapestries, some of which offer the opportunity to question the primacy and desirability of independent nationhood and a unique national identity. Examining the stories Munthe depicts and adapts for his designs, how those tales are implicated in the construction of a national narrative, and the ways in which those stories as well as weaving invite an interpretation of the tapestries that moves beyond the national to explore the difficult path to nationhood and the costs and benefits of independence, allows for a better understanding of how the tapestries came to be labelled as national in the first place.

Daughters of the Northern Lights (figs. 2.1 and 2.2), a tapestry Munthe designed in 1892 and for which he won a gold medal at the 1900 Paris World's Fair, offers the artist's imaginative interpretation of the Norwegian folktale "King Valemon, the White Bear."¹²⁵ The story, as told in Magnus Landstad's *Folkeviser fra Telemarken* (Folk Songs from Telemark), tells of a king who had three daughters.¹²⁶ One of his daughters, his most beloved, became melancholy as a result of her wish for a golden wreath of which she had dreamed and imagined. Her father tried to fulfill her wish for the wreath, but no wreath he brought forth satisfied her longing. One day, when walking in the forest, she came upon a large white bear with the wreath that she had dreamt of around his neck. The bear promised her the wreath, if in return she came to live with him. The

¹²⁵ A quite similar tale is known as "East of the Sun and West of the Moon" and appeared in Asbjørnsen and Moe's *Norske Folke-Eventyr* (Norwegian Folktales) in 1852.

¹²⁶ Magnus B. Landstad, *Folkeviser fra Telemarken* (Oslo: H. Aschehoug and Co., 1925). Landstad's collection of Norwegian Folk Ballads was published in Norway in 1852-53. Landstad was a pastor and poet in Telemark.

princess agreed to go away with the bear in exchange for the wreath. However, when the bear arrived at her home, her father, devastated at the thought of losing his favorite daughter, sent one of her sisters in her place. Upon realizing the king's trickery, the bear returned, only to have the king send her other sister in her place. Once again, the bear returned and this time the king finally relinquished his favorite daughter. The tale goes on, but for the purposes of understanding the tapestry, this first part is of most immediate importance.

The tapestry (fig. 2.1) depicts the white-bear king's three separate visits simultaneously. The bear king enters from the twilight beyond the tapestry, which is shown on the right as a dark-blue sky with stylized white stars. The night sky is revealed as the curtain closing off the room from the outside world has been pushed to the side. The three white bears in the tapestry each strike a slightly different pose and approach a different princess, corresponding to the tale in which the bear is forced to return to the home of the princesses on three occasions. The princesses all respond to his presence in a similar fashion; their eyes are wide and their mouths agape, expressing surprise and fear. Their hair also flows wildly about their heads in a manner that dramatically mimics the flickering of the candle flame on the right side of the tapestry, to the left of the curtain. It appears that the entrance of the bear from the dark world into their vibrant room has let in a brisk evening wind, which musses their hair, disturbs their sleep and the calm flame as well. The sense of disruption further accentuates the alarmed expressions upon the princesses' faces.

The bright, flickering candle, situated on a bedroom table between the foot of one of the beds and the curtain alludes to a part of the story that occurs after the promised daughter goes to live with the bear king. The golden candlestick takes the shape of a woman, standing on a platform, holding up a candle. In the story, after the princess lives with the bear king for a time, she becomes curious about the creature with whom she is spending her life. Despite promising him not to look upon his face while he sleeps, her curiosity gets the better of her and she lights a candle one night after he has fallen asleep. Her broken promise results in her discovering that during the evening her ursine companion becomes a man, a prince, in fact, who is bewitched so that during the day he must live as a bear. With the inclusion of the candle, Munthe hints at the fact that the story goes beyond what he can show, and indicates that the latter part of the story has significance.

Color and pattern decorate the various elements of the room in which the princesses sleep. The only areas without repeated patterns are the bodies of the bears and the white nightgowns that each of the young women wear. The inharmonious juxtaposition of red-orange, green, and blue throughout the tapestry serves to further the notion that the bear king is disrupting the lives of these women. Munthe thought about color carefully, and promoted the idea that colors could convey national pride and identity, considering red, red-violet, blue-green, and bright yellow to be the most expressive of and identified with Norway.¹²⁷ Munthe purportedly came to this belief based on the fact that Norwegian decorative artists had employed these colors for

¹²⁷ Gerhard Munthe, "On Norwegian National Color Choices (*Om norsk nationalt Farvevalg*)" in *Minder og Meninger* (Kristiania: Albert Cammermeyers Forlag, 1919), 64-66.

hundreds of years in painting and decorating wooden furniture and the interiors of grass-roofed wooden homes.¹²⁸ Jens Thiis and Andreas Aubert, art historians and friends of Munthe, also emphasized the importance of Munthe's use of color in relation to a national color palette and the importance of using vivid and bright "Norwegian" colors as opposed to a palette weakened by international artistic conventions.¹²⁹ The tapestry, based on Munthe's design, features even brighter and bolder colors than his watercolor cartoon (fig. 2.2).

Munthe's tapestry, *The Three Brothers*, (fig. 2.3) employs a "Norwegian" color-scheme similar to *Daughters*, particularly through the use of red and blue-green hues. The story of "The Three Brothers," which has some marked parallels to "King Valemon, the White Bear," tells of three princesses who are in love with three brothers. Unfortunately for the six of them, a clan of mountain trolls wishes to have the princesses for themselves. The trolls kidnap the princesses, lock them away in their mountain fortress, and bewitch the three brothers, turning them into a fish, a bird, and a deer. The trolls then cast the key to the princesses' prison out into the world believing that the brothers, in their animal forms, will never be able to find it. However, the brothers search far and wide and eventually locate the key. They free the princesses from their captors, simultaneously breaking the spell that had transformed them into animals. The brothers and the princesses are reunited and everyone is joyful, except the trolls. Munthe's tapestry captures the moment right after the brothers have freed the

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ See Jens Thiis, "La Peinture" *La Norvège: Ouvrage Officiel Publié à l'Occasion de l'Exposition Universelle de Paris 1900* (Kristiania [Oslo]: Imprimerie Centrale, 1900), 580. See also Andreas Aubert, "Et norsk farve-instinkt" *Kunst og Kultur* vol.78 no. 2-3 (1995): 116-128.

princesses. Having finally escaped from the trolls, the princesses reunite with the brothers in a fantastical mountain forest with a crisp flowing stream and brambly pink bushes with white berries. Meanwhile, in the upper left-hand corner of the tapestry, the trolls with their beady eyes and long pointed noses gaze down upon the happy reunion with displeasure. Munthe's depiction of the moment in the story right before the brothers are transformed back into men best captures the events of the tale. Much like *Daughters of the Northern Lights*, he illustrates as much of the story as he can within a single image.

The folktales that these tapestries tell share certain commonalities that indicate Munthe made deliberate choices in selecting them. Both tales feature transformations related to bewitchment, incorporate the use of the number three, and involve the overcoming of a trial. The three brothers find their key, and in "King Valemon, the White Bear" the story goes on to explain that a wicked troll-hag is responsible for the white bear's bewitchment. In the end, the princess saves him and he no longer must live as a bear. In both stories the transformation into an animal form can be and is overcome through due diligence. These stories offer hope that the difficulties of life are surmountable, and, even when magic is involved, tribulations can be overcome.

In terms of design, both tapestries feature two-dimensional planes of color as well as bold patterns. The multiple and varied patterns throughout both of the tapestries fill the colored planes of the pictorial design as well as the borders that frame the folktale scenes. The abundant use of abstracted patterns and designs alludes to the fact that the environments created in these tapestries are otherworldly realms. Places where

men are easily transformed into animals, women's hair stands on end from fright, and trolls live in the mountains just above a magical forest.

The transformative messages of the folktales served a particular purpose during the late nineteenth century. As a Norwegian nationalist, eager for independence from Sweden and to break the remaining ties to Denmark, Munthe's use of these stories signals his belief that Norway could be independent; like the white bear and the three brothers, Norway could be free and sovereign again. In his efforts to promote Norway's political independence, Munthe, like his fellow nationalists, tried to demonstrate that Norway was a country with a rich history, local traditions, and modern industrial capabilities. For Munthe, Norwegian peasants and aspects of peasant life, including folklore and craft techniques, neatly encapsulated the history and traditions necessary for nationhood. For the purposes of constructing a national identity, nationalists represented peasants as isolated in the countryside, removed from industrialization and modernity, and living simple lives in which they practiced handcrafts, such as spinning and weaving. As discussed in the previous chapter, the peasant served as the ideal Norwegian citizen and representative of a true Norwegian character, an image which served Norwegian nationalists and appealed to a broader international audience who found this vision of Norway's humble identity appealing, non-threatening, and in line with established and preconceived notions.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ See M. Mallet, Bishop Percy, trans., I. A. Blackwell, ed. *Northern Antiquities; or, An Historical Account of the Manners, Customs, Religion and Laws, Maritime Expeditions and Discoveries, Language and Literature of the Ancient Scandinavians, (Danes, Swedes, Norwegians and Icelanders.) with Incidental Notices Respecting Our Saxon Ancestors* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1847).

Despite the prevalence of national fervor in Norway during the nineteenth century, and the way in which the tapestries participated in promoting national identity, readings of these tapestries need not be limited to one that reinforces the effort toward national independence. Examining the tales the tapestries represent offers the viewer a reminder of the national traumas that must “always already” be forgotten. As the tales “King Valemon” and “The Three Brothers” make apparent, the use of the number three in folktales is common and frequently indicates the presence of magic.¹³¹ Beyond its magical connotations, the number three also suggests the intimate connection between the Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. Nineteenth-century Norwegian nationalists, including Munthe, promoted the idea of independent nationhood, and did not openly question whether or not Norway should be a nation, but rather contemplated how to achieve recognition as a nation and what exactly defined that nation. Norway’s longstanding and strong ties to its closest neighbors, and sovereign powers, presented a challenge to those seeking to define and distinguish Norwegian identity. Aspirations for independence had not always occupied the minds of Scandinavians, in fact, in the late eighteenth century, scholars, such as the historian P.F. Suhm, wrote about the potential merits of the seemingly separate Scandinavian countries/peoples/territories embracing their kinship and joining together as a powerful collective.¹³² It is not a coincidence that these opinions fell out of favor after the

¹³¹ Here I am thinking of common children’s stories such as “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” “Rumpelstiltskin (*Rumpelstilzchen*) and “The Three Little Pigs,” as well as the story of “Little Kjersti,” which I discuss in chapter three.

¹³² Mirjam Gelfer-Jørgensen, “Scandinavianism – a Cultural Brand,” *Scandinavian Design Beyond the Myth: Fifty Years of Design from the Nordic Countries*, eds. Widan Halén and Kerstin Wickman (Stockholm: Arvinius Förlag & Form Förlag, 2003), 18.

American Revolution in 1776, the French Revolution in 1789, and the forfeiture of Norway by Denmark to Sweden in 1814. However, keeping the historical kinship between these three Scandinavian countries in mind, it is possible to read Munthe's tapestries and their use of threes in a manner that embraces rather than denies or rejects their close-knit, although fraught, relationship.

In *Daughters*, the bear appears three times, but is one king. Rather than thinking of the story and its eventual outcome as solely encouraging perseverance in difficult times, Munthe's representation of the story demonstrates that three can be, and even are, one. In *Brothers*, the three brothers of the title share a fraternal bond, and they work together to achieve success. Moreover, the princesses in both tapestries are sisters, a fact which, again, emphasizes the bonds of kinship, perhaps even in preference over the benefits of going it alone. The number three proliferates again in Munthe's design, *The Three Princesses* (fig. 2.4), which possibly depicts the tale "The Three Princesses of Whiteland" from the compilation of folktales *Norske Folkeeventyr* published in 1852.¹³³ In the story, a young man finds himself in a strange land and takes up the task of saving three princesses trapped and buried in the ground up to their necks. In order to free the princesses, he goes to their castle three nights in a row, each night defeating a troll. Later in the tale, having travelled away from Whiteland, he struggles to find it and on his journey he meets three different men, and then three brothers who have three objects that allow him to return to Whiteland. In the tapestry design, Munthe depicts the

¹³³ The tapestry might also be a reference to the tale "The Three Princesses in the Blue Mountain." A tale which begins with three sisters, normally kept inside the castle walls for their protection, successfully pleading with the guard to let them into the garden. They collect beautiful flowers in the afternoon sun, but after picking a large rose are swept away on a snowdrift.

princesses after the young man has defeated the three trolls. Wearing long orange gowns and small crowns atop their flowing blonde tresses, the princesses pick oversized blooms in a verdant garden beyond the walls of their castle, shown in the upper right corner. The wild woodland figures represented along the bottom of the tapestry refer to the young man's journey back to Whiteland. One of the men he encounters on his journey is a lord over all the beasts of the wood, and in order to help the young man, at this point in the story a king, the lord calls forth all of his beasts to see if they have heard of Whiteland. The collaboration that takes place in the story and the depiction of the three sisters together suggests that an equal and cooperative relationship between sibling nations could provide a happy future.

Norway and the Nation in Art

Although the tapestries are open to an interpretation which potentially disrupts the discourse of independent nationhood, critics have not read them in this fashion, or at least not written of them in such a light. During the late nineteenth century, when Munthe first designed and exhibited the folktale tapestries, of which *Daughters*, *Brothers*, and *Princesses* are only three examples, he had embraced the idea of Norwegian national independence and written about the importance of conveying national identity in art.¹³⁴ In an essay originally published in 1898, Munthe avers "I am

¹³⁴ See Munthe, *Minder og Meninger* (Kristiania: Albert Cammermeyers Forlag, 1919) for a collection of his writings. Munthe's breakout exhibition as a decorative artist came in 1893 with the so-called Black and White Exhibition in Kristiania. See Peter Anker, *Gerhard Munthe: 1849-1929* (Stiftelsen Modums

of the personal opinion that the entire history of art and all logic points to the national as an absolute and demonstrable hallmark of monumentality in art” and goes on to assert “the most exceptional and strongest art has arisen as the expression of one nation’s distinctive view of things as compared to that of another.”¹³⁵ It is quite possible that Munthe’s own position in relation to the nation and art colored the opinions and comments of his contemporaries to some degree and continues to do so in the present day. Nevertheless, the tapestries themselves do present a conundrum to the viewer who recognizes the contradictory readings they offer.

Two of Munthe’s contemporaries, Karl V. Hammer and Sunny Frykholm wrote for the widely-circulated British design magazine, *The Studio*.¹³⁶ In their assessments of Munthe, both critics comment on the distinct nature of Munthe’s tapestries and the manner in which his designs reflect a decidedly Norwegian character. Hammer’s article “Gerhard Munthe, Decorative Artist” notes that Munthe’s work as a designer began rather abruptly after over a decade as a painter of naturalist scenes. Hammer goes on to make an impassioned argument that Munthe’s new decorative art is national, summing up his thoughts on Munthe by asserting “Gerhard Munthe has thus, in his decorative branch, gained knowledge from every source of national art, but he only devotes himself to its deepest characteristics.”¹³⁷ As noted earlier, Hammer, like Munthe, and many Norwegian nationalists of the time, constructs the national and traditional around

Blaafarveværk, 1988), 16, and Jan Kokkin ed., *Gerhard Munthe: En Radikal Stilskaper* (Lillehammer: Lillehammer Kunstmuseum and Labyrinth Press, 2011), 53-61.

¹³⁵ Munthe, Marion Nelson trans., 9-10.

¹³⁶ For more on the circulation of *The Studio* in Scandinavia see Clive Ashwin, “The Nordic Connection: Aspects of Interchange between Britain and Scandinavia (1875-1930),” *The Studio International* v195.n997 (1982): 20-30.

¹³⁷ Hammer, 223.

the Norwegian peasantry and the past.¹³⁸ Hammer, a Norwegian himself, names “that portion of the population,” or those living in rural areas as the point of connection with the past; they are the Norwegians who remain tied to Norway’s “Golden Age,” the time before the unions with Denmark and Sweden when the Vikings supposedly ruled in Scandinavia.¹³⁹

A different perspective on Munthe’s contribution as a designer comes through in *The Studio*’s overview of the Paris 1900 exhibition, for which Frykholm wrote the article, “Scandinavian Decorative Art.” In his review, Frykholm groups together the displays of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark. Frykholm’s grouping while not unusual, is still noteworthy, considering the national movements in Europe, and particularly in the Scandinavian countries, at the close of the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁰ Frykholm begins his review with a discussion of the relative isolation of the “Northern countries” in relation to the rest of Europe, and goes on to note that tapestry weaving is a branch of decorative art that characterizes Sweden and Norway, and is rooted firmly in tradition.¹⁴¹ Frykholm praises the contributions of two Swedish embroiderers and weavers, but when he arrives at Munthe, he seems perplexed, commenting “In the

¹³⁸ Ibid, 222.

¹³⁹ Ivar Libæk and Øivind Stenersen, *History of Norway: From the Ice Age to the Oil Age* (Oslo: Grøndahl & Søn, 1991), 17-35.

¹⁴⁰ S(unny) Frykholm, “Scandinavian Decorative Art,” *The Studio* vXXI (1901): 190-199. Also, while Frykholm loosely defines Scandinavia as the “northern countries” and includes Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland, for my purposes, I think of Scandinavia as encompassing the first three, and the “Nordic countries” as including Finland and Iceland as well as Scandinavia. Also, a note about Sunny Frykholm, although I have referred to this person as a he, I am not sure that Sunny was not a woman. Based on the circumstances of the nineteenth century, I lean towards thinking that Frykholm was a man, however, based on the limited information about S. Frykholm, I cannot be certain and therefore, do not want to make unequivocal claims.

¹⁴¹ Frykholm, 190. Several other European nations practiced weaving; France in particular comes to mind as the *Manufacture Royale des Gobelins* has specialized in tapestry weaving since the end of the seventeenth century.

Norwegian section of Decorative Art, the tapestries by Mr. G. Munthe aroused interest by reason of their strange and weird style. This artist delineates the old, fantastic saga-world of his mountainous country, in various materials, and always in an original and naïve style of his own.”¹⁴² Quickly moving on from this assessment, he concludes that the best tapestries from the North come from Sweden, perhaps his nationalist bias as a Swede shows itself in such a laudatory review for his home country.

Despite his grouping together of the Northern countries in this review, he does take care at the end of his remarks to invoke the nation, writing:

These styles, [which are not imitations of foreign art schools and] which may be truly called Northern, have a far more potent origin, viz., national tradition, as an inexhaustible source of inspiration, while for new impulses the artists have to turn to their own countries, which in modern as in olden times, can offer to the contemplative mind scenery both grand and idyllic, scarcely touched by civilization, and to the worker isolation and peace undisturbed by stirring events.¹⁴³

Frykholm carefully delineates the Northern countries’ styles in the decorative arts from the rest of Europe and the world. Furthermore, he emphasizes the geographical as well as cultural isolation, and the fact that such unique geography finds itself mirrored in the stylistic distinctiveness of the material objects designed and produced in these nations, and in so doing he regionalizes the North. However, in the same review, and just a few pages earlier, he asserts “whatever likeness there may be between the Northern peoples,

¹⁴² Ibid, 192.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 199.

the difference in the character of the countries will always produce great contrasts in artistic style.”¹⁴⁴ These comments appear to be at odds with each other, and I believe express the difficulty that the idea of nationhood presented to Scandinavians during the late nineteenth century. Frykholm recognized the predominance of the nation, and the reasons for defining and distinguishing nations, yet he expressed an appreciation for a unified and fraternal identity of “Northern-ness.”

Munthe’s tapestries, *Brothers*, *Daughters*, and *Princesses*, express a similar tension between the individual and the collective. The three sisters in each of the tapestries all bear a strong physical resemblance to each other; all of them have long blonde hair, fair skin, and small frames. In *Brothers*, the sisters wear the exact same dress and have long tresses flowing down their backs. They strike different poses as they each greet one of the titular brothers and their faces have subtle differences. The brothers are distinguished from one another by their markedly different animal forms, a fish, a bird, and a deer, however, despite their disparate incarnations, they find a way to work together. In *Daughters*, all three sisters sit upright in bed with startled expressions and lightning locks, but are identifiable as individuals by the slight variations in the decoration on their nightgowns. In *Princesses*, Munthe depicts the sisters together in the garden beyond their castle. The king is not depicted, and instead, along the bottom border, three of the woodland creatures called upon to aid the king as he attempts to find his way back to Whiteland cavort. These representations of a shared identity and collaboration reinforce the ambivalence towards and difficulty inherent to the effort to

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 196.

establish an independent Norwegian national identity rather than a communal Scandinavian, Nordic, or Northern identity.

The Norwegian art historian Jens Thiis, director of the *Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum* (National Museum of Decorative Arts/Museum of Applied Art) in Trondheim during the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century, and later the director of the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design in Oslo, did acknowledge some of the various ways in which Norwegian national identity could be read in Munthe's folktale-based designs.¹⁴⁵ In a description of Munthe for a Norwegian publication commemorating the Paris World's Fair of 1900, Thiis emphasizes Munthe's contribution to the industrial arts, in particular his watercolor designs based on popular Norwegian stories, which were woven into tapestries. At the Trondheim museum, skilled weavers, including Augusta Christensen and Ulrikke Greve, translated Munthe's watercolor cartoons into woolen form, using popular weaving techniques and employing the colors specified in Munthe's designs.¹⁴⁶ According to Thiis, Munthe's tapestries were woven in the "traditional" technique of Norway and feature colors that resist the weak hues of conventional international art and design, thus demonstrating Norway's ability as a nation to design and produce goods domestically that embody modern nationality.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Thiis left the National Museum of Decorative Arts in 1909 when he took over as director of the National Gallery in Oslo. See Jan-Lauritz Opstad, *Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseums Vævscole og Atelier for Kunstvævning 1898-1909* (Trondheim: Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum, 1983), 9.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. Augusta Christensen headed the weaving studio from 1898-1900 and Ulrikke Greve from 1900-1904. Both wove tapestries based on Munthe's designs.

¹⁴⁷ Thiis, "La Peinture," 579-580.

This's emphasis on the national aspects of Munthe's art comes through again in a 1903 conference presentation in which he explains the role of his museum in relation to "the work of re-establishment and promotion in an artistic line of the national domestic industry." In doing their part of this "work," This avers that "we at Trondhjem put our chief energies into re-animating our ancient textile technique, and leading the Norwegian textile art further on to modern development on national lines."¹⁴⁸ While he carefully maintains the primary significance of a national domestic industry in the museum's objective, he does tell the crowd, "For all our national partiality, your great William Morris is our master." With this comment he subtly compliments the audience, pays homage to Morris, and acknowledges the influence of the British Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts movements, while quickly moving on to discuss how Munthe, as an artist, employs the theories of Morris, but in a uniquely Norwegian way. In order to show tangibly the efforts of his museum, This brought with him a small selection of tapestries, which included three of Munthe's folktale designs.¹⁴⁹ While This recognized Munthe's designs as incorporating varied motifs, including themes and concepts from Japanese art, in promoting them This emphasized the national.¹⁵⁰ In concluding his conference presentation about the work being done at his museum, he quotes extensively from the comments of the Paris 1900 exhibition jury. The jury described Munthe as "the well-known artist and painter, who has given the impulse to, and had the strongest influence on this movement [aimed at the

¹⁴⁸ Jens This, "The Museum of Applied Art at Trondhjem," *Museums Journal* (March 1904): 282.

¹⁴⁹ The three folktale tapestries This shows in conjunction with his talk are *Daughters of the Northern Lights*, *The Golden Birds*, and *The Bloody Tower*. See This, 285.

¹⁵⁰ Kokkin, 56.

reestablishment of the national in art]. To him is due the honour of having created in our day a real national style of decorative art in Norway, thanks to his special knowledge of the old art and his suggestive re-creating talent.” These comments corroborate Thiis’ high appraisal of Munthe as Norway’s best decorative artist and the description of Munthe as a patriotic, traditional, and national artist of the highest caliber.¹⁵¹ However, since Thiis participated as a juror for the Paris 1900 exhibition and received acknowledgement for his enlightening commentary in the official report on Norwegian woven art, it is likely that his opinions influenced that report as well.¹⁵²

The critical understanding of Munthe’s tapestries, and larger decorative *oeuvre*, as exemplary of the national in art continues in recent scholarship, although more peripherally, in the writings of Widar Halén. Halén acknowledges and accepts, as understood, the Norwegian national character of Munthe’s design work, and chooses instead to emphasize the international influences – which I discuss at length in the following chapter. Halén views the national as tied to a larger project of Munthe’s, arguing “With motifs from traditional Norwegian fairy tales and legends, medieval tapestries, woodcarvings and the local flora and fauna, Munthe urged the development of a native Aesthetic movement.”¹⁵³ In support of the link between the national and international, Halén asserts “Norway’s place in the international world could not be

¹⁵¹ Thiis, “The Museum of Applied Art at Trondhjem,” 283-285.

¹⁵² Ferdinand Leborgne, “Oversættelse af Juryens Officielle Rapport om Norsk Vævkunst og Nordenfj. Kunstindustrimuseums Undstilling af Vævede Tæpper på Verdensudstillingen i Paris 1900,” reprinted in Jan-Lauritz Opstad, *Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseums Vævskole og Atelier for Kunstvævning 1898-1909* (Trondheim: Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum, 1983), 67.

¹⁵³ Widar Halén, “Gerhard Munthe: a Norwegian Pioneer in the Decorative Arts,” *Apollo* 151.459 (2000): 12.

disengaged from its national identity.”¹⁵⁴ However, Halén does not investigate how it is that certain motifs have come to be “Norwegian” or emblematic of national identity. Yet his argument encourages the notion that international conceptions of the Norwegian nation during the nineteenth century contributed to Munthe’s and other nationalists’ envisioning and representation of Norwegian identity.

Although I agree with much of what Halén lays out in terms of the international influences at play in Munthe’s tapestry designs, his evaluation of Munthe as a *Norwegian* designer fails to address why the national presents itself so strongly in the early response to Munthe’s work, nor even in Halén’s own writing, which presses against the national, trying to move beyond it. At the end of one of his earlier articles on Munthe, Halén writes “Here, at last, we are far from ‘the concept Norwegian’ that Munthe has previously been associated with in art history.”¹⁵⁵ The resistance to and/or avoidance of discussing the national in detail might be due to the fact that so many others already have commented on the national character of the tapestries, and thus that approach and understanding of the tapestries appears well-known, widely accepted, and not in need of further elucidation. However, this avoidance of the issues of “Norwegian-ness” and the nation also might relate to an observation Hilmar Bakken makes in his mid-twentieth-century monograph on Munthe:

[Munthe’s] decorative art proves his connection with *l’art nouveau* and the universal exertions towards creating a new style, which triumphed at the

¹⁵⁴ Widar Halén, “The Fairytale World of Gerhard Munthe” (presented at the Réseau Art Nouveau Network Historical Lab “National Identity and International Trends,” Ljubljana, March 2006): 10.

¹⁵⁵ Halén, “Gerhard Munthe and ‘The movement that from Japan is moving across Europe now,’” *Scandinavian Journal of Design History* v4 (1994): 47.

exhibition in Paris [1900]. But his creation was felt as one of the most personal, original, and strikingly national, and may be so still, although parts of his work are now felt to be passé.¹⁵⁶

By the middle of the twentieth century, the designer and his work were no longer in vogue in Norway and had become symbolic of a particular moment in history when Norway struggled for national independence and identity. Munthe had contributed to the construction of a genealogical nationhood through an appropriation of international ambivalence towards the idea of the naïve and isolated, but enduring Norwegian peasant, and produced the peasant and peasant culture as heritage only to have his tapestry designs become part of that same heritage as mid-twentieth century designers and art historians sought to produce an updated modern visual identity for Norway. Halén's allusion to the relationship between the international art world and the construction of Norwegian national identity during the second half of the nineteenth century helps contextualize Bakken's comment about mid-twentieth-century attitudes towards Munthe's work within the Norwegian design world.¹⁵⁷

Elisabet Stavenow-Hidemark alludes to this issue further in an essay on Scandinavian design for the exhibition catalogue *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Europe and America*. She discusses the contributions to the Arts and Crafts Movement made by Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland, and hints at the bond between the Scandinavian nations, but also the discomfort that characterizes their relationship at the

¹⁵⁶ Hilmar Bakken, *Gerhard Munthe: En Biografisk Studie* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1952), 250.

¹⁵⁷ Bakken's comment likely refers to the change in the look of Scandinavian and Norwegian design during the first half of the twentieth century. Munthe's ornamental designs are visually dissimilar to the clean, simple, minimal designs of more modern decorative objects that were popular at the time Bakken wrote his book.

close of the nineteenth century. The remarks she makes at the conclusion of the section of her essay dedicated to Norway makes apparent the problem at the heart of the understood, but unexamined labeling of Munthe's tapestries as Norwegian. In discussing the relative popularity of Munthe's tapestries, as compared to those of fellow Norwegian tapestry designer and weaver, Frida Hansen, Stavenow-Hidemark observes:

Despite her [Hansen's] triumphs at the international expositions in Paris (1900) and Turin (1902), she encountered strong resistance in her native country. Thiis did not collect her work because he did not consider her techniques or decoration to be sufficiently "Norwegian." With her symbolic images and international connections she did not, until recently, achieve the sort of esteem enjoyed at home by Munthe.¹⁵⁸

It seems contradictory that Thiis, who supported weaving as a Norwegian craft and dedicated himself to its revival in part through the development of a weaving atelier at the *Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum*, would find Hansen's enterprising career and innovative techniques lacking in a Norwegian spirit.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, it is difficult to understand how Hansen's international connections troubled Thiis, when he openly acknowledged that Japanese art and William Morris had influenced Munthe.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Elisabet Stavenow-Hidemark, "Scandinavia: 'Beauty for All,'" in *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Europe and America 1880-1920: Design for the Modern World*, ed. Wendy Kaplan (New York: Thames & Hudson Inc., 2004), 198.

¹⁵⁹ For more on Thiis role in establishing the weaving school and atelier, see Jan-Lauritz Opstad, *Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseums Vævscole og Atelier for Kunstvævning 1898-1909* (Trondheim: Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum, 1983).

¹⁶⁰ See Halén, "G.M.: A Norwegian Pioneer," 13-14, and Jens Thiis, *Gerhard Munthe: En Studie* (Trondhjem: Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum, 1904), 28.

Unlike Munthe's contemporaries, more recent critics and art historians do not need the tapestries to construct Norwegian nationhood, but rather use them for different purposes and read them for different meanings. Nevertheless, the national persists as a characterization of Munthe's tapestry designs, although exactly how they represent the nation and embody "Norwegian-ness" remains unclear. However, if part of the national character of Munthe's tapestries resides in their local production, in their medium tied to Norway's peasants, in the depiction of folktales passed down through the ages by that same "portion of the population," which remained "scarcely touched by civilization" and therefore witnesses to and participants in the ancient history of Norway, then these people, the people, and their past, the past, are fundamental in imagining and defining the nation.¹⁶¹

The close relationship between Munthe's tapestry designs and a vision of the nation as tied to the people and the past requires an examination of nineteenth-century and contemporary notions of nationhood. As noted in chapter one, Ernst Renan, a contemporary of Munthe, offers a genealogical explanation for the nation in his treatise "What is a Nation?" and his ideas regarding the nation are useful as they provide a window onto perceptions of the nation during the late nineteenth century in Europe. Renan argues that nations "are something fairly new in history."¹⁶² However, he goes on to assert that historical events and shared experiences bind people together and form a basis for nation formation, noting "The modern nation is a historical result brought

¹⁶¹ See above, Hammer, 222, and Frykholm, 199.

¹⁶² Ernst Renan, Martin Thom trans. "What is a Nation?" in *Nation and Narration*, Homi Bhabha ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), 9.

about by a series of convergent facts.”¹⁶³ Renan goes on to discuss the possible influences of ethnography, language, religion and geography as characteristics that define or identify a nation, however, he finds none of these factors as compelling as the idea of the will of humankind, ultimately describing the nation as a “spiritual family” and “the outcome of the profound complications of history.”¹⁶⁴ Central to Renan’s argument are the people who populate the nation and the fact that they have common memories, which lie in the past, as well as a desire (or will) to go forward together in the present and into the future. They remember together and forget together (and remember that they forgot too). Despite the violence which may have preceded the nation, Renan ultimately asserts that nations are good for the present moment because they guarantee liberty, although he believes they are not “eternal” and will come to an end, to be replaced by something else.¹⁶⁵

Like Renan, Munthe’s understanding of the nation embraces the belief that nations form around groups of people. He identifies the nation as largely based on shared past experiences, and explaining his understanding of the nation, he writes:

A nation is built on a people’s common circumstances . . . What we call nationality is the distinctive character which these common circumstances create so that one group of people segregates itself from another in the way it thinks and conceptualizes.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Ibid, 11-12.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 16-18.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 20.

¹⁶⁶ Munthe, Marion Nelson trans., 10.

Munthe's perception of the "people" as essential to the nation is similar to Renan's; both believe that people who have things in common are integral to nation formation. If we understand Munthe's "common circumstances" to mean shared memories and/or experiences, their ideas align even more closely.¹⁶⁷ Munthe and Renan seem to agree that a shared history is an integral part of nation formation. Moreover, the people who carry that common history with and between them constitute the nation.

While nineteenth-century perspectives on the nation provide initial insight, more recent scholarship on nation formation, the nation, and nationalism engages with and expands upon these earlier ideas and presents various theories regarding the cultural changes that lead to nationalism, how the nation is formed and what the nation is. These more recent theories, particularly Homi Bhabha's examination of the role people play in composing the nation, problematize (1) the strange relationship the new and old have in the construction of the nation, (2) the necessity of forgetting in the formation of a shared or common history, and (3) the way in which the idea of a people totalizes a diverse population of individuals.

Recent scholarly undertakings do corroborate Renan's assertion (from 1882) that the nation is a relatively recent concept.¹⁶⁸ In the introduction to *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Eric Hobsbawm reiterates Renan's point, arguing "the word

¹⁶⁷ In chapter one, I examined Renan's thoughts on the nation, and am referencing his particular quotation regarding commonalities that I cited: "To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more – these are the essential conditions for being a people." Ernst Renan, Martin Thom trans., "What is a Nation?" in *Nation and Narration*, Homi Bhabha ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), 19.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 9.

[nation] is no older than the eighteenth century.”¹⁶⁹ While contemporary scholars, such as Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson, agree that the nation is a new concept, new in the sense that it is over two hundred years old, they also note that some aspect of history comes into play in defining the nation. As Anderson explains “If nation-states are widely conceded to be ‘new’ and ‘historical,’ the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and still more important, glide into a limitless future.”¹⁷⁰ For Norwegian nationalists such as Munthe, the Viking age embodied the immemorial past, a time impossible to remember but capable of being imagined, and, aspects of it, recreated based on discoveries in the present. However, Munthe disliked the so-called “Viking” and/or “Dragon-style” as he found it vulgar and reductive.¹⁷¹ His approach towards the creation of a national style, which in some ways expresses hesitation towards nationhood, considers the nation in a more nuanced fashion. Rather than rote repurposing of Viking motifs and designs, such as the incorporation of stylized dragons, which capitalized on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century national and international interest in the discovery and excavation of three Viking-era ships, Munthe’s works struggle to negotiate the difficulty of the national mandate to collectively remember and forget.¹⁷² Munthe’s depictions of Norwegian

¹⁶⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3.

¹⁷⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1983), 19.

¹⁷¹ Kokkin, 51.

¹⁷² The Viking Ship Museum, just down the road from the Norwegian Folk Museum, houses the three Viking ships excavated during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Tune ship was found first in 1867 near Fredrikstad, the Gokstad ship, in Sandefjord was excavated beginning in 1880, and the Oseberg ship, in Vestfold, which attracted the most interest from the public, was located in 1903 and excavated in 1904.

folktales in colors expressive of the nation arguably demonstrate his promotion of the nation, and yet the tales themselves express uncertainty about independence.

Selective and collective memory is not a simple maneuver, as Bhabha argues, “To be obliged to forget – in the construction of the national present – is not a question of historical memory; it is the construction of a discourse on society that *performs* the problematic totalization of the national will.”¹⁷³ The need for a common history requires forgetting, but forgetting obliterates the nuances of history and experience in the creation of *a people*, which the nation desperately requires. The people must collectively remember certain historic violences (actions now regretted) as forgotten, while actually forgetting other violences that are not as advantageous to the construction of a cohesive and empowering historical narrative. For Norway in the nineteenth century, this type of memory is constructed via never and always forgetting the years of union with Denmark as well as attempts to forget, or rather, ignore the inconvenient contemporary presence of the Swedish monarch.¹⁷⁴

Munthe and his critics accepted and relied upon “the people” in their understanding of the nation and characterization of his art as national. However, the tapestries offer material evidence of the problems associated with imagining and constructing the nation and the people, which Hobsbawm, Anderson, and Bhabha examine. The tapestries, like the nation, seem to merge new and old, new designs with

¹⁷³ Homi Bhabha, “DissemiNation; Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), 311.

¹⁷⁴ Despite still being subject to Swedish rule after 1814, Norwegian nationalists promoted the notion that Norwegian independence occurred in 1814 after the end of Danish rule and the signing of their constitution.

old stories and weaving techniques, they also, like the people, rely upon a constant and dubious memory that repeatedly forgets and remembers the national past, a forgetting of Swedish rule combined with a forgetful remembering of over four hundred years of Danish rule, and they depend on the idea of a unified Norwegian people who all understand the stories represented. Through these devices, the tapestries become labeled as ideal representations of Norwegian nationalism; however, as argued earlier in this chapter, the folktales as Munthe depicts them offer the opportunity to disrupt the national narrative. When placed in conversation with other nationalists' projects that attempted to provide evidence substantiating Norway's imagined history, Munthe's designs help illustrate the problems of new and old, of forgetting, and of the totalizing label of "the people" associated with the narrative of national history and identity.

Collecting and Constructing the People

Munthe's interest in the people and his comprehension of their expediency to the national narrative of Norway did not surface solely in conjunction with his folktale-based designs. During the early years of his artistic career, as a painter dedicated to representing naturalist landscapes and scenes of peasant life (figs 2.5 and 2.6), Munthe traveled through Norway studying the landscape and the people. These earlier works, such as *Potato Picking* (fig. 2.5) and *October Evening* (fig. 2.6), often depict the Norwegian landscape and peasant life as beautiful and idyllic. In *Potato Picking*, Munthe represents a bucolic scene of collaborative agrarian life, offering a window into

the labors of peasants as they harvest potatoes from a small field surrounded by trees. The two seated women in the right foreground of the painting appear to be chatting amiably, which suggests that the workings of the farm and the harvest allow for moments of rest and relaxation. Further emphasizing the Norwegian landscape while highlighting his ability to render the environment and atmosphere, Munthe's painting *October Evening* offers a sensitive and moody depiction of the Norwegian country. The trees have lost varying amounts of their yellow, orange, red, and green leaves alluding to the impending change of season. The diminutive stature of the figures in the middle ground of the painting, at the river's edge and seated on the leaf-covered slope nearby, highlights the vastness of the varied landscape, which includes gently rolling hills, a rippling river, and a dark, tree covered mountain. Although the work emphasizes the natural environment, Munthe has included a farm off to the left and in the distance. A small farmer appears in the field, taking in the last of the harvest before winter. Behind him, the small white farmhouse with smoke coming out of the chimney and a cozy orange glow emanating from the two windows on the first floor offers a place of respite from the overwhelming beauty and power of nature. While the majority of Munthe's paintings take a similar approach and feature outdoor scenes, his studies and travels did take him inside people's homes.

Munthe's notebooks, which include sketches of scenes that feature individuals in interiors, hint at the artist's interest in the domestic sphere (figs. 2.7-2.9). In a page from his notebook (fig. 2.7) that he has divided neatly into two parts, Munthe carefully depicts a warp-weighted loom on the left-hand side of the page. He includes enough

detail in the sketch to show how the loom works even though his drawing is small. On the slightly angled vertical loom, the warp threads are attached to the horizontal beam at the top and have weights at the bottom to keep them parallel vertically. The two lower adjustable horizontal rods, the shed rod and the heddle rod, allow for a simple over and under weave. The loom requires an expanse of wall space, but considerably less square footage than a floor loom (fig. 2.9). On the right side of page, Munthe has drawn a man and woman sitting at a table in a cozy corner of their timber home. Even though the space of the drawing appears small and truncated, it contains a number of objects. At the far left, next to the window, part of a cupboard is shown, its shelves laden with dishes. The window to the right of the cupboard lets in light so the man can read, presumably aloud, as his mouth is open, to his companion. In the corner between the two figures is a narrow and tall cabinet. To the right of the woman, an ornate mirror hangs high on the wall, and a tall clock standing on the floor just makes it into the scene. While the juxtaposition of the two drawings may have been happenstance, their pairing nonetheless draws a connection between the quotidian lives of people and the craft of weaving. Munthe's sketches (see also figs. 2.8 and 2.9), made years in advance of his tapestry designs arguably suggest that the artist had a longstanding interest in weaving as a craft "of the people," an interest which he explored in greater depth with his tapestry designs. Supporting and furthering this argument, his drawing that depicts a woman seated near a window spinning prepared wool (fig. 2.8), as well as his rough sketch of a woman seated at a large floor loom (fig. 2.9) illustrate Munthe's attention to people as central to the fabrication process. These intimate depictions of women at work

reinforce the notion that people are essential to the production of textiles as well as other domestic goods, much like people are essential to the project of fabricating the Norwegian nation.

Munthe, as well as the philologist Ivar Aasen, and folklorists Peter Asbjørsen and Jørgen Moe, believed in the Norwegian nation and the notion that the Norwegian people deserved complete political independence. In order to prove Norway capable of handling and worthy of independence these nationalists embarked on cultural missions that sought to collect and construct Norwegian national identity via the people.¹⁷⁵

In their endeavors to uncover and locate Norwegian national identity in a hermeneutic search through the countryside, following the genealogical conception of the nation, these men sought answers from the *bonde*, the rural inhabitants of Norway.¹⁷⁶ These men constructed Norwegian national identity using cultural artifacts created from folk culture and regional dialects to create what they originally had hoped to find.¹⁷⁷ The urban-dwelling bourgeoisie in particular had an active and vested interest in rural Norway, realizing, as Andrew Robert Linn eloquently argues, that:

There was nothing in the bourgeois present of post-independence [post-1814] Norway which could be opposed to Denmark and to Danish customs, so these

¹⁷⁵ As noted in the introduction and chapter one, Norwegians celebrate their independence on May 17th in commemoration of that day in 1814 when their independent Norwegian constitution was signed into law. However, despite this independent declaration, Norway did not truly become independent, that is no longer in a political union with Denmark or Sweden until 1905.

¹⁷⁶ For more on the genealogical approach to the nation, see chapter one, 16-18.

¹⁷⁷ Here I understand “cultural artifact” in a manner similar to that which Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett explicates in relation to ethnographic objects/fragments in *Destination Culture*. Kirschenblatt-Gimblett discusses the way by which through display and attempts to “know” disciplines make their objects and themselves. “Ethnographic objects are made, not found,” and “They *bec[o]me* ethnographic through processes of detachment and contextualization.” (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 3 and 18-19.

features of Norway's independent nationhood had to be sought in the *other* Norway, that of the remote areas and the remote past.¹⁷⁸

At the root of nationalists' great hope in the peasant was the belief that their remote position in the Norwegian countryside somehow left them isolated from and untouched by the Danish and Swedish influences in urban centers such as Kristiania.¹⁷⁹

Nationalists held tightly to the belief that those dwelling in remote areas had escaped the cultural deterioration that modernity, Danish and Swedish rule, and immigration had arguably caused in urban areas; therefore these rural inhabitants could be relied upon to embody true "Norwegian-ness," and teach those recently awakened to their national identity and/or corrupted by Danish influence about Norwegian nationhood.¹⁸⁰ The idea of exploring the Norwegian countryside in order to learn about the nation found support in the organization *Den Norske Turistforening* (The Norwegian Tourist Association). Founded in 1868, the Tourist Association sought to encourage Norwegians to get to know their own country by going on walking tours, and in order to further this goal, the association provided tourists huts in the mountains.¹⁸¹ By exploring the far reaches of their unique home country, their nation, Norwegian tourists seemingly participated in and contributed to the shared experiences and knowledge central to nationhood.

¹⁷⁸ Andrew Robert Linn, *Constructing the Grammars of a Language: Ivar Aasen and Nineteenth-Century Norwegian Linguistics* (Münster: Nodus-Publikationen, 1997), 70-1 and 74.

¹⁷⁹ Oscar Falnes, *National Romanticism in Norway* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), 209-230.

¹⁸⁰ Ernst Gellner corroborates the constructed nature of this narrative, noting "nationalism is *not* the awakening of an old, latent, dormant force, though that is how it does indeed present itself," and argues that nationalism instead is the *consequence* of new form of social organization, educated high culture, that is part of modernity. See *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 46.

¹⁸¹ Popperwell, 39.

Munthe's sketches (figs 2.7 -2.9) participate in these nationalist imaginings about the countryside and help build a narrative that pictures spinning and weaving as typically Norwegian peasant crafts. In his survey of the Norwegian landscape during his early artistic education, Munthe, as a Norwegian citizen and artist, came to know his country as the Association intended and in a fashion similar to Aasen, and Asbjørsen and Moe, who had participated in these types of tours prior to 1868. Additionally, Munthe's sketches highlight the craft labor of peasants, which the national organization, *Den Norske Husflidsforening* (The Norwegian Homecraft Association) celebrated and promoted. The Homecraft Association, not unlike the Tourist Association, encouraged Norwegians to know their nation, and capitalized upon the idea that home crafts were a vibrant tradition in Norway, encouraging the production and sale of such goods.

Before Munthe's explorations or even the establishment of the Tourist Association, folklore historians Asbjørsen and Moe had traveled through the Norwegian countryside as part of their nationalist project. They spoke with rural dwellers in an attempt to locate, collect, and document local folktales and folklore, in order to demonstrate an enduring and singular Norwegian tradition of telling tales. Similarly, the philologist, Ivar Aasen, who embarked on his project before Asbjørsen and Moe, sought the "true" Norwegian language in the dozens of diverse regional dialects with the belief that through careful documentation he would be able to piece together a language that featured less Danish language influence in terms of spelling and pronunciation. His initial hope being that this new, yet old language would better communicate "Norwegian-ness," and provide Norway with a sense of linguistic unity.

Unfortunately, the national projects that these men set forth to accomplish were riddled with difficulties from the start, chiefly their unreasonable expectation that certain things or people do not change over time. The peasants these nationalists had imagined as living isolated and idyllic Norwegian lives did not exist. The rural inhabitants these men encountered did not spend their time worrying over the loss of stories or language, but rather concerned themselves with their own subsistence, as the landscape and climate of the Norwegian countryside presented a multitude of challenges to anyone attempting to cultivate or navigate the land. The difficulties these nationalists faced illustrate that the Norwegian nation, as they imagined it, is a myth, and yet, the mythic story of the nation, like the folktales of Munthe's tapestries, persists.

According to Oscar Falnes, an early historian of Norwegian nationalism, Asbjørnsen and Moe understood that connections between Norwegian folktales and those of "other peoples," such as the Germans, existed. Nevertheless, their main goal was to demonstrate the uniqueness of the Norwegian version of the tales.¹⁸² Furthermore, simply recording the stories that they came across when talking to rural inhabitants was not enough, the stories needed to be told, when written, in a manner similar to the way in which they had been told orally for years, otherwise their national significance would not be readily apparent.¹⁸³ While Asbjørnsen and Moe recognized that the manner in which one tells a tale is significant, they did not consider that in the various retellings of the tales, the stories themselves had transformed. As Jack Zipes argues, in his book *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, "In each historical

¹⁸² Falnes, 224 and 229.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 230.

epoch they [folktales] were generally transformed by the narrator and audience in an active manner through improvisation and interchange to produce a version which would relate to the social conditions of the time.”¹⁸⁴ Since stories change with each telling and transform to address the social circumstances of particular historical moments, attempting to convey such tales in writing and in a manner that mimics the way they have been told for years seems impossible.

The inconsistencies that are part of the nature of folktales, brought on by the telling and retelling of the tales, thwarted Asbjørsen and Moe’s systematic endeavor. They found multiple versions of each tale, and the people telling the tales spoke a variety of regional dialects. In writing down the tales, they therefore faced two key questions: What version of each story should be written down and thus preserved? And, what variation upon the Norwegian language should they use in documenting the story in order to make their compendium of tales representative of the nation? The wealth of material they had gathered proved to be a burden rather than a blessing, and they found themselves, in some cases, combining different versions of the tales to create one cohesive story. Despite their initial hurried compilation and presentation, the first small pamphlet of stories published in 1841 was well-received in Norway, with compliments coming from the historian P. A. Munch.¹⁸⁵ A series of folktale collections followed and the first complete collection, *Norske Folkeeventyr*, was published in 1852. Moe eventually gave up folk collecting, but Asbjørsen continued, and in 1870 found himself

¹⁸⁴ Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 33.

¹⁸⁵ Marte Hvam Hult, *Framing a National Narrative: The Legend Collections of Peter Christen Asbjørnsen* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 39. See also, Ørnulf Hodne, *Jørgen Moe og folkeeventyrene: en studie I nasjonalromantisk folkløstikk* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1979).

overwhelmed at the question of dialects while editing the stories. Asbjørnsen ultimately chose to publish all the tales in Dano-Norwegian rather than in a rural dialect. However, he did incorporate select words from various dialects in order to maintain a sense of the tales “popular” origin.¹⁸⁶ This strategic use of language pleased literary purists of the time who regarded regional dialects as vulgar.¹⁸⁷

Upon publishing their folktale compendium, much to the authors’ dismay, the volume received harsh criticisms, particularly from Henrik Krohn, a writer for *Bergensposten*, to the effect that the stories included were told incorrectly and that the language used was not suited to the tales.¹⁸⁸ These criticisms further demonstrate that some Norwegians believed correct versions of folktales existed, and that a proper Norwegian language could be excavated and expressed in written form. Language, folklore, and history entwined, and, as Asbjørnsen and Moe discovered, the language, folktales, and people they had imagined and hoped to find did not exist in the state of authentic, historical stasis they had imagined. Rather, the tales that people had shared for centuries were told in different dialects, and featured different details. Each time a story was/is told, the possibility for inconsistencies in the tale existed/exists. These inconsistencies eventually led/lead to various versions of the tale. Therefore, slightly different versions of similar tales circulated throughout Norway, and different regions came to tell their versions in their own particular dialect. There was no way for

¹⁸⁶ Falnes, 233-4.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 234.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 235. Krohn particularly came out against the use of Dano-Norwegian, believing that it mutilated the stories and their national character.

Asbjørnsen and Moe to retrace the different tellings of the folktales, or to find the innumerable tellers.

While Asbjørnsen and Moe faced the dialect problem as part of their folktale project, the linguist and philologist, Ivar Aasen, attempted to resolve the language problem from the outset. Believing that language served an important role in the formation of national identity, he planned to excavate and codify a Norwegian language and grammar that did not reflect the four hundred years of Danish language influence.¹⁸⁹ For Aasen, a single, more authentic Norwegian language symbolically demonstrated Norway's unified and independent nationhood.

As early as the 1830s, Aasen began contemplating the potential of language as an aspect of Norwegian national identity. As Aasen scholar Andrew Robert Linn argues, "Indeed it was the very fact of independence which was a principal motivating force in Aasen's linguistic work."¹⁹⁰ Aasen's attempt to find the language "heirs" of Old Norwegian amongst the multiple dialects, particularly those spoken in western Norway, reflects the urges to collect, record, and display that played significant roles in nineteenth-century Norwegian nationalists' efforts to fabricate the nation.¹⁹¹ Aasen recognized the difficulty involved in his endeavor and acknowledged that his intent was not to rid Norway of Danish altogether, but rather to create a language more expressively Norwegian, which Norwegians could use in addition to Danish and Dano-

¹⁸⁹ Perhaps finding encouragement in the poet Henrik Wergeland's *Om norsk Sprogreformation* of 1835, in which Wergeland called for an independent Norwegian language. See Popperwell, 226.

¹⁹⁰ Linn, 32. Norwegians celebrate their national independence on May 17th each year, which commemorates the Eidsvoll assembly's approval of their independent constitution in 1814. Despite this constitution, Norway remained under the Swedish crown until 1905, when they elected a Danish prince to become their monarch. For more on this see Linn, 68-69, and Libaek and Stenersen, 63-4 and 87.

¹⁹¹ Linn, 70-1 and 74.

Norwegian in order to help nationalist efforts at disentangling Norway from Denmark and Sweden.¹⁹² Despite the fact that he did not entirely denounce the Danish language, and perhaps the predominance of Danish as a form of written and spoken communication made this impossible, Aasen remained adamant that language was an integral aspect of nationality. Linn explains Aasen's point of view, noting "in 1857 he wrote of the Norwegian language as 'the most important of all features of lineage' and went on to state that 'As long as we speak true Norwegian, we can freely call ourselves true Norwegians and the rightful offspring of the ancient Norwegians even if we don't follow all their traditions in other ways'."¹⁹³ Aasen's assertion of the primary importance of a national language in establishing and representing the nation as independent participates in a larger discourse about the nation and language. As Hobsbawm argues "languages become more conscious exercises in social engineering in proportion as their symbolic significance prevails over their actual use. . ."¹⁹⁴ Despite Swedish sovereignty over Norway and the independent Norwegian constitution of 1814, Danish had remained the official language. The continued and predominant use of a language that represented Norwegian subjugation clearly vexed Aasen, and he, therefore, worked to overcome that which he viewed as an obstacle to Norwegian independent nationhood. The actual use of Aasen's excavated language did not matter as much as the project he undertook to locate and codify it. However, in his effort to resolve and simplify the languages spoken in Norway, Aasen ended up creating another dialect, *landsmål* (the language of the land). Renamed *nynorsk* in 1929, the newer name

¹⁹² Falnes, 291 and 295-6.

¹⁹³ Linn, 73.

¹⁹⁴ Hobsbawm, 112.

literally means “new Norwegian,” a label which strangely contradicts Aasen’s aspirations for his project.

Not all Norwegians or even nationalists supported Aasen’s linguistic enterprise, which perhaps accounts for its continued secondary status as compared to the contemporary widespread use of *bokmål*. P. A. Munch, an influential force among nationalists, came out against the return to Old Norwegian – despite initially having supported the idea – arguing that it represented a retreat from culture and civilization.¹⁹⁵ At the same time, he privileged Old Norwegian over Danish, arguing that it was “magnificent” and should remain separate from Danish.¹⁹⁶ Munch also asserted that the link between language and nationality represented a concern of a more primitive state of culture and Norway, being a modern society, did not need a national language.¹⁹⁷ Munch’s points of opposition to Aasen are telling in that they draw attention to the uneasy juxtapositions between old and new, and modern and primitive, which served as the basis for Norwegian national identity. His remarks also link with Hobsbawm’s argument about the role of language in social engineering, and seem to indicate that Munch recognized that the existence of Old Norwegian was significant in demonstrating that Norway had a national past. Norwegians did not need to speak Old Norwegian, rather it was enough that the language existed and became part of the national narrative.

¹⁹⁵ Falnes, 270, 299 and 311.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 311.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 312.

Knud Knudsen, a school teacher and language reformer, offered yet another opinion in opposition to Aasen's endeavor.¹⁹⁸ Arguing that the attempt to change the Danish-influenced Norwegian did not make sense, Knudsen poignantly asserted that just as a people should not alter their history; neither should they cast aside their literary medium when that medium becomes inconvenient.¹⁹⁹ Rather than encouraging the advent of a new language, Knudsen supported changing the spellings of Danish words to reflect Norwegian pronunciation. This position towards language recognized that the Danish language, while intelligible to Norwegians, had been imposed on them and that they had negotiated this imposition by adapting their oral pronunciation. In order to reflect and document these adaptations, orthographic changes should be made.²⁰⁰ Knudsen recognized the historical erasure at work in Aasen's effort and offered a pragmatic remedy.²⁰¹ By locating a Norwegian language that reflected the nationalist narrative of history and challenged the legitimacy of the Danish and Swedish monarchies, Aasen had hoped to bolster Norwegian national identity. He edited and imagined history in a way that catered to the image he had of what it meant to be Norwegian and a nation in the nineteenth century. Like Munthe's landscape paintings and sketches of domestic scenes, Aasen's project depended on choosing which aspects of history to document and represent.

¹⁹⁸ Gregg Bucken-Knapp, *Elites, Language and the Politics of Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 43.

¹⁹⁹ Falnes, 274.

²⁰⁰ Popperwell, 196.

²⁰¹ The back and forth between Aasen and Knudsen is representative of a broader divide amongst Norwegian nationalists during the nineteenth century. This divide, perhaps rooted in the literary world, appears to coalesce around the poets Henrik Wergeland and Johan Welhaven. Wergeland advocated for the rejection of all things Danish, while Welhaven did not agree that nationality required the complete denunciation of the seemingly Danish aspects of life and culture. Despite their disagreement, the two men appear to have shared a great deal of interests. For more on this see Falnes, 26-38.

Although voices of dissent came out against Aasen, as Linn properly points out “Nobody sought to supplant Aasen’s grammar with one containing forms standardized through closer reference to Old Norwegian.”²⁰² Munch had no need to offer an alternative as he already had achieved a position of prominence amongst Norwegian nationalists as a result of his historical texts, and furthermore saw no purpose in such an endeavor. For Knudsen, the alternative to Aasen was a continuation of the status quo, and therefore, he had no reason to “supplant” Aasen’s *landsmål* project.²⁰³ Other philologists, perhaps having learned from Aasen’s thankless effort, did not endeavor to further Aasen’s project or engineer one of their own.

Furthermore, once Norway achieved independence in 1905, the symbolic significance of a single, uniquely Norwegian language was less necessary.²⁰⁴ As Hobsbawm pointedly argues, “Danish-influenced Norwegian was and remains the main medium of Norwegian literature. The reaction against it in the nineteenth century was nationalist.”²⁰⁵ Aasen’s *landsmål* project and the resistance to Danish and Dano-Norwegian in Norway during the nineteenth century did not relate to problems of person-to-person communication. Rather, anti-Danish reaction positioned Denmark and Danish as not Norway or Norwegian; Denmark provided a point of differentiation and Danish became the *other* language, which nationalists, such as Aasen could utilize to help define Norway and encourage Norwegian national pride. The pride in the old, original and even primitive belonged to a particular group of Norwegians, the bourgeois

²⁰² Linn, 95.

²⁰³ Ibid, 96.

²⁰⁴ Hobsbawm, 112.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

urban-dwelling nationalists who viewed a rural existence as decidedly outside of and yet necessary to modernity. Once again, Hobsbawm's remarks on language and nationalism are apt:

Linguistic nationalism was the creation of people who wrote and read, not of people who spoke. And the 'national languages' in which they discovered the essential character of their nations were, more often than not, artefacts, since they had to be compiled, standardized, homogenized and modernized for contemporary and literary use, out of the jigsaw puzzle of local or regional dialects which constituted non-literary languages as actually spoken.²⁰⁶

His description corroborates the privileged position of those who sought markers of national identity in language, and believed that people dwelling in less-populated, isolated rural areas somehow retained in their spoken language an essential Norwegian-ness.

Today, Aasen's influence persists, and throughout Norway schools teach two slightly different versions of the Norwegian language, *bokmål* and *nynorsk*. The division between the two official forms of the Norwegian language, along with the continued use of multiple dialects demonstrates the partial success and impossibility of Aasen's effort to consolidate the various Norwegian dialects into a single, particularly Norwegian, written and spoken form. Paradoxically, Aasen's effort to cohere the dialects ultimately led to the acceptance and use, albeit limited, of yet another form of the Norwegian language – *nynorsk*.

²⁰⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 147.

Asbjørsen and Moe experienced greater success than Aasen in terms of the widespread appreciation for their work. Despite some nineteenth-century criticisms of their folktale compendium, Asbjørsen and Moe's collection of tales holds a place of honor in Norwegian culture as *the* anthology of Norwegian folklore. Similarly, Munthe's position as the creator of a national art remains largely unquestioned. These nationalists' attempts to document and write a Norwegian national narrative by collecting the languages, folktales, and crafts of "the people" produced carefully fabricated images, stories, and a language that have come to be understood as Norwegian. Their projects created cultural artifacts or fragments, as Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett discusses in *Destination Culture*. While she is largely concerned with museum displays, her understanding of artifacts and fragments remains useful in the context of these projects, which simultaneously found and created remnants of the past in order to produce the modern nation.²⁰⁷ The folktales, language, home crafts, and everyday life of "the people" imagined as historic had the potential to produce Norway as a nation with an independent history. The difficulty involved in these efforts to produce national heritage, encourages a return to Munthe's tapestries and supports a reading of them that expresses ambivalence towards independence.

²⁰⁷ Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 3, 7, and 19.

The Ties that Bind

Oscar Falnes, an early historian of nineteenth-century Norway, refers to nationalists, such as Munthe, Asbjørsen and Moe, and Aasen, as national romantics, in his 1933 book *National Romanticism in Norway*. Falnes repeatedly criticizes national romantics for their tendency to see things such as folklore and language as static and pure, instead of as aspects of a society and culture that adapt to and change with the circumstances and interests of people.²⁰⁸ Surprisingly, in light of these criticisms, he still finds the attempt to locate a pure form of folklore and language possible, asserting “The folk traditions retained their national significance only in so far as they remained essentially unimpaired by foreign influence.”²⁰⁹ His criticisms of the national romantics when coupled with this assertion further demonstrate the conflicting attitudes toward Norwegian nationhood. Later on in the text, Falnes laments the way in which change works destructively, noting, in regard to the work of Asbjørsen and Moe “Since folklore had such conspicuous importance, it seemed imperative that its salvaging should be done with the greatest possible accuracy. But the sources on which the collectors had to rely were frail and haphazard.”²¹⁰ Falnes recognizes that the effort to salvage and recover is fraught with difficulty, but not in the sense that efforts to salvage and recover actually produce and complete the disappearance of folklore.

He also blames progress, and perhaps modernity for what he believes are the losses to national culture noting “it was undeniable that progress had seriously impaired

²⁰⁸ Falnes, 278.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 250.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 255.

the nationality by facilitating the penetration of foreign influences.”²¹¹ Non-Norwegian people and cultural influences, such as publications and artworks, which circulated widely in urban areas, were to blame for the disintegration of an independent Norwegian culture, which thus impeded the work of national historians, folklorists and philologists. Falnes even claims that “whole elements of the population . . . [were] corrupted by cosmopolitanism,” a comment that indicates his own belief in an “uncorrupted” people that might have brought the true and long-standing Norwegian national identity into the present moment, if not for the increased urbanization and cultural exchange taking place.²¹² In his attempt to historicize the national romantic movement, Falnes reinforces the impulse of those he examines, his critique of cosmopolitanism parallels Munthe’s critique of the worldly artist, and demonstrates the persistent allure of a “true” and “uncorrupted” Norwegian national identity.²¹³

In writing his history of late nineteenth-century Norwegian nationalism, Falnes engages in what Svetlana Boym terms “restorative nostalgia,” a nostalgia that mirrors the historical projects of the national romantics about whom Falnes writes. Boym characterizes restorative nostalgics thusly:

[Restorative] nostalgics do not think of themselves as nostalgics; they believe that their project is about truth. This kind of nostalgia characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-

²¹¹ Ibid, 251.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ For Munthe’s critique, see chapter one, 24-25.

making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths and, occasionally, through swapping conspiracy theories.²¹⁴

Her description aptly describes Falnes' history, which seems based in a conspiracy theory that blames foreign influences and progress for the deterioration of folk cultures and the challenges that faced those seeking to define Norwegian identity in the nineteenth century. The history Falnes has written reflects the historical practices of the national romantics, of restorative nostalgics, among them Munthe, Asbjørnsen and Moe, and Aasen, all of whom imagined national identity through history, but a mythic history in which the rural inhabitants of Norway embodied "Norwegian-ness." As Boym further argues, this kind of nostalgia seeks a restoration of origins or a reconstruction of a lost home.²¹⁵ Yet the home and origins that these nineteenth-century nationalists attempted to reconstruct or restore did not exist, and so, instead, they imagined what that home was like because in that present moment, they needed a Norway of the past. In order to be a nation, to participate in the modernity of that nationhood, and go forward as an independent political and economic power, Norway, paradoxically, needed to document and present its history and characterize its nationhood. As Boym eloquently articulates, "Nostalgia is not always about the past, it can be retrospective but also prospective. Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future."²¹⁶ Nationalists created a mythic history in order to meet the demands of modernity and be successful in the future.

²¹⁴ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41.

²¹⁵ Boym, xviii and 43.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*, xvi.

Munthe's tapestries draw the national myth-makers, especially Aasen, and Asbjørsen and Moe, together, tightly binding the problems of documenting folktales and writing a language to a visual representation of national identity. His designs tell the folktale, and in so doing, tell the story of Norwegian nationalism, a story of restorative nostalgia. Like most of the stories upon which Munthe based his designs, there are bits of the fantastical and bits of the real intertwined. Munthe in some ways attempted to materialize the nation and envision nationality, and art historians have used his tapestries and drawings to tell the story of the Norwegian nation and the path to independence, despite the fact that this narrative participates in a problematic conception of the Norwegian people and history. Moreover, Munthe's designs maintain their national character even though that character, as defined through an imagined relationship between the rural inhabitants of Norway and the past, seemingly recovered through folklore, language, and craft techniques, is hardly definitively or distinctly Norwegian.



Fig. 2.1 Gerhard Munthe, *Daughters of the Northern Lights (The Suitors)*, designed 1892 (woven 1899)



Fig. 2.2 Gerhard Munthe, *Daughters of the Northern Lights*, 1892 (watercolor)



Fig. 2.3 Gerhard Munthe, *The Three Brothers*, designed 1908

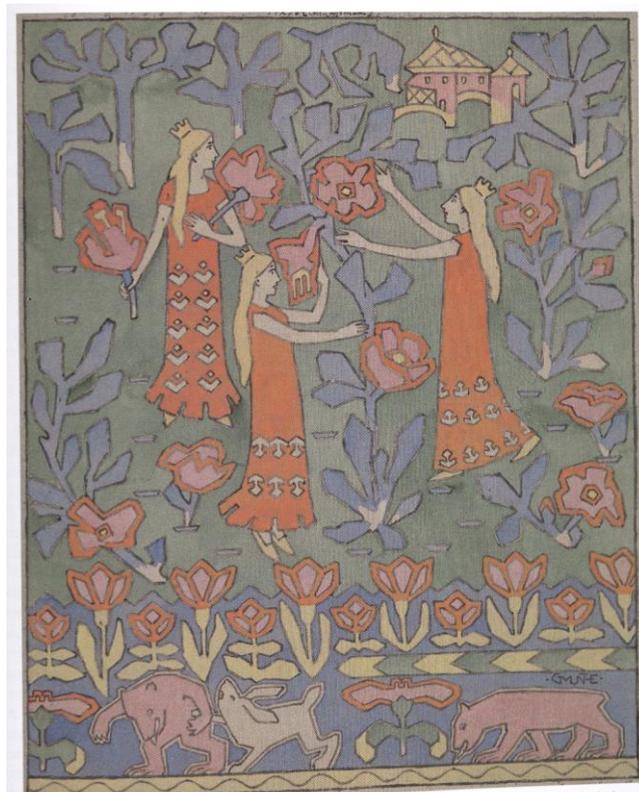


Fig. 2.4 Gerhard Munthe, *The Three Princesses*, 1892 (watercolor)



Fig. 2.5 Gerhard Munthe, *Potetopptagning* (Potato Picking), 1878



Fig. 2.6 Gerhard Munthe, *Oktoberaften* (October Evening), 1881



Fig. 2.7 Drawing from Gerhard Munthe's notebook, National Library Oslo



Fig. 2.8 Sketch from Munthe's notebook, c. 1870s, National Library Oslo, MS 1070



Fig. 2.9 Sketch from Munthe's notebook, c. 1870s, National Library Oslo, MS 1070

Chapter Three

Retelling the Tale: Folklore and Modernity

“The idea of ‘the international’ was popularized in London in 1867, when the world exhibition of that year was named the Great International Exhibition. The new word evoked the global order of imperialism that the exhibition was intended to represent.”²¹⁷

Timothy Mitchell

Munthe’s tapestries wove together various narratives, literally and metaphorically, for his late nineteenth-century audience. Included among these metaphorical narratives, woven together tightly, are the art historical, the national, and the international. These narratives discuss Munthe as a painter, a decorative artist, a designer, a national romanticist, an artist committed to the nation and the making of a national Norwegian art as well as an artist engaged with the trends of the late nineteenth-century European art world. The folktales Munthe depicts in his tapestry designs remind the viewer that these narratives are bound together and rely upon each other.

Widar Halén touches on all of these stories about Munthe, and emphasizes the art historical and international narratives in his examination of Munthe’s late nineteenth-century design endeavors. For Halén, the aspects of Munthe’s work that demonstrate the artist’s interest in design beyond the strictures of nationalism present

²¹⁷ Timothy Mitchell, *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 4.

the opportunity to illustrate the significance of Munthe in a broader art historical context, that of late nineteenth-century European art and design. Overall, I agree with much of what Halén asserts in terms of Munthe's exploration and use of the theories and motifs of the Aesthetic movement, the Arts and Crafts movement, *art nouveau*, *japonisme*, and Symbolism. However, in examining these modern movements and positioning Munthe as engaged with their ideas, it becomes clear that these movements or trends are tied together by certain repetitive narrative threads, including an insistent borrowing and imagining, a focus on craftsmanship, and a repurposing of the historical.

In his writings, Halén sets aside the national aspects of Munthe's design endeavors, and concerns himself with those which he classifies as international.²¹⁸ In explaining the international aspects of Munthe's design *oeuvre*, in one of his first in-depth articles dealing with the artist's work, Halén emphatically and thoroughly examines the nineteenth-century vogue for and fascination with Japanese art and culture in relation to Munthe's designs.²¹⁹ In order to give visual emphasis to his written argument, Halén compares Munthe's tapestry *Daughters of the Northern Lights* (fig. 3.1) with a page from a German book of Japanese textiles, *Japanische Textilomamenten*, (fig. 3.2), which would have been available to Munthe at the library

²¹⁸ See Widar Halén, "The Fairytale World of Gerhard Munthe" in *Kiss the Frog!: The Art of Transformation* (The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, 2005): 52-63, Halén, "Gerhard Munthe: A Norwegian Pioneer in the Decorative Arts" *Apollo* v151.n459 (2000): 11-18, and Halén, "Gerhard Munthe and 'The movement that from Japan is moving across Europe now'," *Scandinavian Journal of Design History* (1994): 27-47. To a lesser degree, Halén, "The Dragon Style in Norwegian Decoration" *The Magazine Antiques* (1 September 1997).

²¹⁹ See especially Halén, "Gerhard Munthe and 'The movement that from Japan is moving across Europe now'," *Scandinavian Journal of Design History* (1994): 27-47.

of the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design in Kristiania.²²⁰ The pattern features a rod that cuts diagonally across an olive background. A red and white striped and diversely patterned panel appears to hang from the rod like a curtain and various red, gold, green, black, and white floral motifs fill the olive plane around it. On the lower left of the pattern, a blue cloud-like form overlaid with an incomplete repeating pattern of intersecting circles truncates the curtain. Halén compares the textile pattern and Munthe's *Daughters* tapestry, noting "The similarities in the choice of color and constellations of patterns are striking, and one can only confirm that Munthe must have seen these or similar Japanese models."²²¹ In order to further his argument, Halén uses another image from *Japanische Textilomamenten* (fig. 3.3) and compares it to Munthe's *Silver Roses* wallpaper pattern (fig. 3.4), arguing "The books on Japanese textiles found in the museum's library contained similar silver-rose patterns and Munthe had undoubtedly been inspired by stylized depictions of this kind."²²² Through these comparisons as well as a discussion of the various points of contact Munthe might have had with British and continental *japonisme*, Halén endeavors to demonstrate Munthe's participation in the art world beyond the confines of Norwegian nationalism. Although this examination of international influences works to position Munthe in an art historical context with significance to those outside of Norway, Halén's tacit acceptance of the national and emphasis on the international nature of the tapestries also legitimates

²²⁰ Halén argues that Munthe would have had access to the library's collection as a result of his close relationship with the head of the library, art historian and founder of the Norwegian Folk Museum, Hans Aall. See Halén, "G.M. and 'The movement that from Japan is moving across Europe now'," 33.

²²¹ Ibid, 42.

²²² Ibid, 44.

the characterization “national” while suggesting that those aspects of the work are less significant.²²³

Folklore and the specific tales that Munthe depicts offer a more nuanced understanding of the artist’s engagement with nationalism as well as internationalism, and a chance to think more precisely about this moment in terms of art history.

Daughters of the Northern Lights (fig. 3.1), examined in the context of the nineteenth-century European art world, does, as Halén argues, demonstrate Munthe’s wide array of artistic interests. However, it also reveals the ambiguous, manufactured, and imagined nature of national identity so central to the notion of “internationalism” as well as modernity. The tale “King Valemon – the White Bear,” represented in Munthe’s *Daughters* tapestry, is a story about a bewitched prince and a princess who together restore the prince to his human form. But it also is a story about a journey that builds character, which requires the princess to face challenges in pursuit of rescuing that which has been lost (her husband), and eventually results in a return home with a different identity. Munthe’s tapestry tells this story in one image that depicts three white bears and three wide-eyed princesses. The image relies on an allusion to the rest of the story, by way of the candlestick at the foot of the bed, to help the viewer recall the rest of the narrative.²²⁴ Munthe’s reference to this particular tale merits further examination

²²³ He concludes noting “Here, at last, we are far from ‘the concept Norwegian’ that Munthe has previously been associated with in art history.” Ibid, 47.

²²⁴ The princess later uses a candle to look upon the bear’s face while he is sleeping and discovers that he becomes a man as night falls. Unfortunately, in looking at him in this manner, the princess breaks her promise to the bear. Bewitched by a troll hag, he must go into the mountains and spend his life with her because the princess was unable to keep her promise. Fortunately, the princess goes after the bear and on her journey into the mountain completes three vital tasks that then provide her with three special trinkets she can use in order to defeat the troll hag. The princess arrives at the mountain, saves her bear, who actually is a prince, and they return home together happily. This version of the story is based on the

as the story emphasizes the importance and malleability of identity. The proliferation of pattern along with the medium of weaving encourage a reading of the tapestry that analyzes the relationship amongst the various narratives it offers the viewer.

The repeated pattern elements mirror the story itself and reflect the oral traditions that carry folk stories through time. Oral cultures rely upon repetition to remember folktales, as Walter Ong explains in *Orality and Literacy*:

In an oral culture, to think through something in non-formulaic, non-patterned, non-mnemonic terms, even if it were possible, would be a waste of time, for such thought, once worked through, could never be recovered with any effectiveness, as it could be with the aid of writing.²²⁵

Munthe plays with repetition and patterns, which characterize the oral folktale and in so doing the tapestry functions as a visual text. Threes and multiples of threes populate the work and call to mind the way in which the story relies on this same number to perpetuate itself; there are three bears, three princesses, three times three abstract flowers or pinecones along the top and bottom edges of the tapestry, three stars in the night sky, and three abstracted waterfowl on the back wall of the bedroom.²²⁶ All of these threes remind the viewer of the folktale's formula, which needed to be recalled in order to be retold, and thus while the tapestry explicitly tells only the part of the story

original English translation of Asbjørsen's written version of the tale, Peter Christen Asbjørsen, George Webb Dasent trans., "King Valemon, the White Bear" in *Tales from the Fjeld* (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1908): 376-388.

²²⁵ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word* (London; New York: Methuen, 1982), 35.

²²⁶ Hilmar Bakken also discusses the repetition in this tapestry, but emphasizes its allusion to mysticism. Hilmar Bakken, *Gerhard Munthes Dekorative Kunst* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1946), 57-58.

that features the three visits of the bear king, its repetition reminds the viewer of the pattern of three so essential to the oral tale. Although Munthe represents the story after Jørgenson and Moe (and Landstad) included it in their folktale compendium, their written version does not eliminate the various oral versions that still remain; rather the written, which features the use of three as well, carries with it the tale's history of orality.²²⁷

The tapestry alludes to the efforts of Jørgenson and Moe, their attempt to “recover” Norway's folklore, which resulted in their *Norske Folkeeventyr*, a compilation, reconstruction, and amalgamation of folktales. Their written version of the tales represents a departure from folktales' usual reliance upon the oral and memory, and yet the ways in which they adapted the folktales for their written volume, consolidating similar stories and filling in gaps in order to make the stories relevant for their time, as exemplars of a national past, are in keeping with the way in which people use folklore. As folklore historian and theorist Jack Zipes argues, “a tale that draws a person's attention and is recorded in his or her brain will not be told again as a communication, whether oral or written, in exactly the same way, but the person will tell it because he or she feels it is relevant in a certain sociocultural context.”²²⁸ For Jørgenson and Moe (as well as Munthe), folklore was relevant because they believed it demonstrated the existence of a national past. They grouped together stories from a

²²⁷ Not surprisingly, written versions of the story that appeared in other compendiums had variations in the title and narrative details. See, for example, Magnus B. Landstad, *Folkeviser fra Telemarken* (Oslo: H. Aschehoug and Co., 1925). Landstad's collection of Norwegian Folk Ballads was published in Norway in 1852-53.

²²⁸ Jack Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre* (New York; London: Routledge, 2006), 11.

particular geographic region and retold them in writing and categorized them as Norwegian because building a national identity and being an independent nation both were relevant in their sociocultural context of late nineteenth-century Europe.

The tapestry, as a textile, also plays with the history of folklore and the sharing of tales. The word “text” comes from a root meaning “to weave” and as Ong avers, “Oral discourse has commonly been thought of even in oral milieus as weaving or stitching.”²²⁹ Different stories come together, like warp and weft, to become one, and different storytellers weave unique threads of their own into the tales they tell. Asbjørnson and Moe followed this tradition, inadvertently and out of necessity. Although fellow folklore historians have faced criticism for similar interventions in “true” folktales, the stitching and weaving processes are in keeping with the oral tradition.²³⁰ Ong goes on to argue that “text” remains too closely associated with writing to be a viable way of understanding orality. However, Munthe’s tapestries, as visual texts, operate as a bridge between orality and writing. The stories in the tapestries are

²²⁹ Ong, 13.

²³⁰ There is a body of literature seemingly initiated by Richard Dorson which concerns itself with sorting out the different between genuine folklore and fake folklore or “fakelore.” For a summary of this see Alan Dundes, “Nationalistic Inferiority Complexes and the Fabrication of Fakelore: A Reconsideration of *Ossian*, the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, the *Kalevala*, and Paul Bunyan” in *Papers for the 8th Congress for the International Society for Folk Narrative Research*, Bergen, Jun 12th-17th (1984): 155-171. For more on Dorson’s particular point of view, see *Folklore and Fakelore: Essays toward a Discipline of Folk Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

Dorson has particular ire for “fakelore,” which he defines as any “synthetic product claiming to be authentic oral tradition but actually tailored for mass edification” (Dorson 1976, 5:quoted in Dundes, 155). Dorson’s dedication to sorting out the two is not a distinction of interest here. Folklore, in my understanding, depends upon synthesis and its ultimate goal is to edify. Moreover, the Brothers Grimm, who set the standard in the collecting of oral folktales seem to have invented the tradition of inventing/synthesizing/tailoring folktales, which seems quite appropriate as Asbjørnson and Moe patterned their work in the manner of the Grimms (Dundes, 159). Also, it is strangely paradoxical that Dorson’s book tends toward disciplining folk studies, when folk tales, a key area of his interest, by their nature resist that gesture.

documents, but they do not require literacy in order to be read.²³¹ Munthe designed the tapestries, but his wife, Sigrun, and several women involved with and working at the weaving atelier at the National Museum of Decorative Arts in Trondheim, including Augusta Christensen and Ulrikke Greve, actually wove the designs; retelling the stories and weaving them in their own fashion.²³² More than one woven version of each tapestry design exists and there are of course variations between tapestries that feature the same design.²³³ The tapestries interwoven idiosyncratic design elements thus mimic the folkloric process which relies upon the creative contributions and editing of storytellers to perpetuate the folktales.

Munthe again plays with the repetitious patchwork of folklore in his tapestry *Liti Kjersti*, c. 1900, (fig. 3.5), which depicts the folk ballad of the same name.²³⁴ On the right, Kjersti sits on the throne (silver chair) of the Mountain king who has placed his

²³¹ Although Munthe's tapestries feature the "tales of the folk" and were displayed at national and international exhibitions and thus viewed by a broad audience, they remained luxury objects chiefly within the reach of an upper middle-class audience. Moreover, although his tapestries were admired by fellow Norwegians, his landscape paintings sold well in Norway while his tapestries found a better market abroad. See Bakken, 70.

²³² Munthe's wife, Sigrun Sandberg Munthe (1869-1957) began weaving after spending time with her husband in the Norwegian countryside, and became interested in the weaving she saw hanging in farm houses. In 1888, Gerhard designed his first tapestry for Sigrun to weave. In chapter two, I discuss the weaving atelier and the role of the Norwegian Home Craft Association in promoting the production and sale of locally made tapestries. For more, see Laurann Gilbertson and Kathleen Stokker, "Weaving Bewitchment: Gerhard Munthe's Folk-tale Tapestries" *Vesterheim: A Publication of Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum* v1n2 (2003): 18-25. See also, Jan-Lauritz Opstad, *Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseums Vævscole og Atelier for Kunstvævning 1898-1909* (Trondheim: Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum, 1983).

²³³ The example of *Liti Kjersti* that I examine here varies from another version that features additional figures to the left of the main scene. The exception to the rule of multiples are Munthe's designs representing the ballad *Åsmund Fregdegjeva*. Munthe created ten separate cartoons to illustrate the extensive story, which Ragna Breivik wove over a number of years (1923-1949). Breivik only wove one example of each of the ten cartoons. For more, see Gilbertson and Stokker, 18-25.

²³⁴ Of course there are numerous versions of the folksong *Liti Kjersti* circulating, however, the version I rely upon here is Magnus B. Landstad's from his *Folkeviser fra Telemarken* (Oslo: H. Aschehoug and Co., 1925), 83-5. Landstad worked in a manner similar to Jørgenson and Moe.

furry arm around her shoulders in order to coerce her into drinking from the small cup that he offers in his right hand.²³⁵ To his right, a young mountain woman, distinguished from Kjersti by her hairy feet with claws, holds a large chalice. The folk song explains that the Mountain king wooed Kjersti, giving her a golden ring, which made her his queen, as well as a golden harp. When Kjersti's mother becomes angry upon learning that her daughter secretly has born children to the Mountain king, Kjersti plays her golden harp, which summons the king. He whisks her away to his home in the mountains, and places her on his throne, giving her red-golden honey to drink. After her first sip, the Mountain king asks her, "Where were you born, and where were you raised, and where were your maiden clothes made?" Kjersti replies, "In Veiarlandi [Norway], there I was born, there I was raised and there my maiden clothes were made."²³⁶ However, after three sips of the honey, Kjersti states "In the mountain I was born, and there I was raised, and there my maiden clothes were made." Kjersti will spend the rest of her days living in the mountain with her husband, the Mountain king, who is not a man, but rather some kind of mythic creature (a troll or an elf) who has used his magic to beguile his human wife.

The tapestry features the actual text of the mountain king's three questions woven underneath the scene of the three figures (*Hvor er du født, hvor er du baaren, hvor er dine jomfruklæder skaaren*). Below the text, in the bottom register are three horned mountain goats, referencing the new, yet old, mountain world to which Kjersti now belongs. Above the three central figures, in the top border of the tapestry, an

²³⁵ Some versions of the story call him the "mountain" king, others the "elf" king, but either way he is an otherworldly figure, as Munthe denotes by depicting him with hairy arms and legs, and claws.

²³⁶ Veiarlandi is located in Vestfold county, approximately 100 kilometers south east of Oslo.

evening landscape with rolling hills, trees, and a starry night sky has three times three stars and three times three trees. The position of this landscape at the top of the tapestry makes reference to Kjersti's Norwegian home in Vestfold, the place she has left and to which she will never return after her third sip of the golden honey wine. As in *Daughters*, Munthe makes particular use of the number three.

Munthe also relies upon various large and small patterns to fill the colorful open planes of his designs and to create borders, a design method which likely borrows from earlier Norwegian tapestries that employ the same techniques, such as the well-known thirteenth-century *Baldishol tapestry* (fig. 3.6). The background and borders of the *Baldishol tapestry* feature varying patterns, including a stylized wave motif along the top border and a repeating ribbon-like scroll design along the bottom, as well as numerous intersecting patterns around the two figures, which frame, fill, and decorate otherwise solid planes of color. Munthe also creates borders that frame the central scene of his tapestries; in *Liti Kjersti*, the top and bottom borders, which Munthe uses to help tell the story, feature a repeating pattern of trees and goats respectively. The top of Kjersti's dress, the bottom of her skirt, and the various components of the mountain woman's outfit all feature decorative patterns, as does the light blue background of the scene, which has an overlay of irregular and overlapping, ivory pointed-arches. In *Daughters*, the borders are not as clearly delineated. However, along the top and bottom edges of the tapestry a red, green, and blue abstracted flower, possibly a pinecone with needle-filled branches, repeats, albeit interrupted by one of the white bears. The flowers combined with the confluence of other patterns, such as those on the bedclothes, the

curtain, the bedframes, and the back wall, that populate the tapestry refer back to the oral folktale and the need for repetition and patterns, which help people recall the narrative.²³⁷

These two tapestries and the folk stories they depict demonstrate the way in which folklore embraces and allows for movement and overlap between identities and worlds. The narratives of these folktales encourage us to reconsider what Halén's critical evaluation of Munthe as an international artist actually means, and to examine the way in which artistic exchange happens, particularly in the context of the late nineteenth century when the exhibition facilitated and encouraged artistic exchange and simultaneously celebrated (and critiqued) the unique characteristics of national displays at universal expositions. Rather than parsing out the national and international characteristics within Munthe's work, the various arguments about the tapestries and the tapestries themselves highlight the folkloric character of modernity. Folktales, as demonstrated through Munthe's tapestries and the folk stories they depict, rely upon memory, sharing, repetition, remaking and interpreting, as do narratives of modernity.

The folktales Munthe envisions in his tapestries trouble the designations of national and international, and demonstrate that the critical positioning of Munthe's work reflects the desires to have dominion, to know, and to define the self against the other. The categories of national and international reinforce and reinstitute the disciplining practices of international exhibitions, which sought to objectively order the world into distinct, knowable and identifiable geographic areas and peoples, or nations.

²³⁷ See note 224.

Objectivity depends on a certain distance or separation, and thus dividing the world into categories became a show of power and rationality as well as a convenient way in which to demonstrate and achieve distance. However, these large-scale exhibitions, which brought and presented objects to mass audiences, also imagined and manufactured distance and discreetness as a way of coping with the uncomfortable closeness of modern life. Discomfort arises from being too close to other people, and being aware that an other is inextricably part of comprehending and identifying the self.²³⁸

Proximity and Art History

The ambivalent discomfort with closeness operates on an individual, national, and disciplinary level. Within art history, there is a tendency to define and discipline styles, movements, and/or groups of artists into categories. While admittedly useful, this tendency mimics the imperial desires to know, categorize, and separate. Defining artistic movements remains a thorny issue, which Rosalind P. Blakesley struggles with in her in-depth study of the Arts and Crafts movement. Blakesley finds that the devil is in the details, and that nuance complicates categorization. Since her ultimate focus remains the Arts and Crafts movement, she eventually embraces drawing lines between movements to some degree, particularly *art nouveau* and Arts and Crafts.²³⁹ While

²³⁸ For more on exhibitions in the nineteenth century, see chapter one.

²³⁹ In the introduction to her text, *The Arts and Crafts Movement*, Blakesley notes “It is not for one movement to claim exclusive ownership of an artist, group of artists or their creative output . . . Works of art can carry multiple meanings which lead to different readings, with the result that individual designs

nuance does complicate the drawing of lines and borders between people and places, folktales, which do not acknowledge such boundaries, instead encourage proximity and sharing.²⁴⁰ Closer examination of the practices of Munthe and some of his kindred contemporaries such as Arthur Lazenby Liberty, William Morris, and, fellow countryman, Edvard Munch, demonstrates the repetitive yet nuanced pattern of modern artistic trends. While Munthe's tapestries illustrate his artistic achievements, his awareness of trends in the art world of his time, and his attempt to comprehend his role as an individual, an artist, and a Norwegian, his work also points to the folkloric narrative of modernity.

Considering Munthe's tapestries in the midst of the stories of other "modernists" helps elucidate the repetitive, imaginative, didactic, and adaptive character of narratives of modernity. As noted, Munthe's tapestries engage with nineteenth-century trends in the art world not confined to Norway. The story of Arthur Lazenby Liberty and his eponymous shop Liberty & Co. demonstrates the way in which the British Aesthetic movement encouraged adherence to notions that Munthe also promoted in his artwork. Furthermore, the understanding of Liberty's achievements in the context of the Aesthetic movement begins to demonstrate the translatability of modernity as a sort of folklore. Prior to establishing his celebrated shop Liberty & Co. in May of 1875,

can be associated with more than one artistic trajectory . . . The aim here is to offer a sensitive and nuanced account which acknowledges the common ground, but where necessary draws a distinction between the two movements [Art Nouveau and Arts and Crafts]. On occasion, this has meant unashamedly claiming or reclaiming a particular work for the Arts and Crafts," (London; New York: Phaidon, 2006), 9.

²⁴⁰ It is not my intent to argue that folktales are all good and can solve the problems of the world, but rather that in this instance they support a model of thinking about Munthe that moves away from imprecise and imperialist tropes. As Zipes explains in detail in *Why Fairytales Stick*, folktales can be subject to changes that do not empower people, but rather pacify them. See pages, xi-xii and 1-39.

Liberty had gained experience in the retail of import goods and established a clientele of artists while managing Farmer and Rogers' Oriental Warehouse.²⁴¹ Liberty began working at Farmer and Rogers' Great Shawl and Cloak Emporium in 1862, the same year as the London International Exhibition which featured objects from the private collection of Sir Rutherford Alcock, the first British Minister in Japan. Included among this collection of Japanese objects at the exhibition, which drew Liberty's attention as well as that of numerous attendees, were lacquerwares, bronzes, and porcelain.²⁴² After the exhibition closed, Farmer and Rogers' acquired a large group of objects from the exhibition which served as the basis for their establishment of the Oriental Warehouse adjacent to their existing retail emporium. Two years later in 1864, Liberty became the manager of the warehouse, and only left, ten years later, after the owners rejected his appeal to be made partner. Having cultivated a clientele through his years managing the Warehouse, Liberty, aided by the encouragement of his friends, went into business and opened his store, originally with the name East India House.²⁴³

Initially specializing in the sale of imported goods from China, Japan, and India, Liberty became famous for his fabrics, and in order to meet demand, began commissioning British designers to create patterns similar to those he imported. Liberty's shop played a key role in the popularity of so-called artistic interiors during the nineteenth century. Artists and individuals, including Oscar Wilde and James Abbott McNeill Whistler, both of whom promoted carefully composed interiors filled

²⁴¹ Alison Adburgham, *Liberty's: A Biography of a Shop* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1975), 19.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 12-13.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 17-21.

with well-designed objects that demonstrated thoughtful artistic taste, did not adhere to one particular notion of the “artistic” interior, but rather found themselves in association based on their efforts to encourage an improvement in British taste.²⁴⁴ Liberty & Co. offered for sale items that met recommendations for the new interior that advice manuals, such as Charles Locke Eastlake’s *Hints on Household Taste* of 1868, prescribed. The recommendations encouraged a move away from the oppressively dark and crowded Victorian interior in favor of spaces that featured either modern-made furnishings inspired by historic British furniture of centuries past or actual British furnishings from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To accompany these supposedly well-made and durable objects, patrons could turn to Liberty for new materials and objects that would demonstrate their unique and particular taste.²⁴⁵

Modern Aesthetic interiors played upon the reverence conjured by historic styles, the seeming authority and authenticity that the past imbued, and yet also the desire to escape from modern life through a retreat into the past. Similarly facilitating the desire to escape, the “Oriental” wares featured in these interiors offered the possibility to imagine fantastical lands and peoples providing a diversion from

²⁴⁴ For more see Charlotte Gere with Lesley Hoskins, *The House Beautiful: Oscar Wilder and the Aesthetic Interior* (London: Lund Humphries in association with the Geffrye Museum, 2000) and . Stephen Calloway and Lynn Federle Orr, eds., *The Cult of Beauty: The Aesthetic Movement 1860-1900* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011).

²⁴⁵ Gere and Hoskins, 8, 35-6, 47 and Doreen Bolger Burke, Jonathan Freedman, Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen, David A. Hanks, Marilyn Johnson, James D. Kornwolf, Catherine Lynn, Roger B. Stein, Jennifer Toher, and Catherine Hoover Voorsanger, with the assistance of Carrie Rebor, *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* (New York: Rizzoli in association with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 27 and 111.

modernity.²⁴⁶ These interiors, like Munthe's tapestries, supported the fashion for the new, but also required a link to the past. Arguably, Munthe's home in Leveld, which he designed and decorated, participates in the fashion of the deliberately artistic environment that Aesthetes as well as adherents of the Arts and Crafts movement found themselves constructing in order to teach by example.²⁴⁷ The photograph of Munthe sitting in the living room beside his wife Sigrun (fig. 3.6) offers insight into the dynamics of their relationship as well as a view onto the carefully decorated interior space. Christian Krohg's 1885 portrait of Munthe hangs on the wall to the left of the chimney.²⁴⁸ The chimney features two mantel shelves that display a collection of ceramics, and below these shelves, directly above the fireplace, Munthe's design *Fire Play* (fig. 3.7) adorns the surface; abstracted feminine forms with swirling skirts and long golden hair suggest the flickering flames of a fire. To the left of this visually allusive border, on the ledge below the portrait, sit a series of small photographs, and below the wooden ledge and rail, framed, are two of Munthe's watercolors, the one on the right is *Daughters of the Northern Lights*. Munthe sits in a chair he designed for a hotel interior in Norway (fig. 3.8) nonchalantly reading the paper, decidedly at home in this deliberately eclectic, but artistic environment.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ One of the most well-known Aesthetic interiors being Thomas Jeckyll and Whistler's *Peacock Room* (1876-6) for Frederick Leyland. For more on this interior, see Lionel Lambourne, *The Aesthetic Movement* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996), 50-60.

²⁴⁷ For more on Aesthetic artist studios see Marilyn Johnson, "The Artful Interior" in *The Pursuit of Beauty* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art: Rizzoli, 1986): 111-146. For an Arts and Crafts environment, see for example, William Morris' *Red House*.

²⁴⁸ The prominent placement of the portrait suggests Munthe's ability to embrace contradictions, since he and Krohg did not see eye-to-eye on artistic matters. Krohg rejected the idea of national art and romantic landscapes. See Kokkin, 36.

²⁴⁹ Although the focus here is on Munthe. Sigrun's gaze, which focuses on something beyond the photograph, and posture, which leans away from her husband, not unlike the tulips in the vase on the

Closely tied to the Aesthetic movement, the British Arts and Crafts movement also emphasized the integral social role of design and the designer. Debates about the role of design in society and its ability to improve the quality of life of all people did not originate with Aesthetes or even in the nineteenth century, however, proponents of good design, such as Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812-1852), Owen Jones (1809-1874), John Ruskin (1819-1900), and William Morris (1834-1896), did gather a great deal of steam for the notion of design reform during the time period.²⁵⁰ Ruskin and Morris in particular had allied views about the craftsmanship of the Middle Ages and idealized the organizational structure of craft guilds.

Writing of Gothic architecture in his volume *Stones of Venice* (1853), Ruskin directs the reader to “gaze upon the old cathedral front” and

examine those ugly goblins, and formless monsters, and stern statues, anatomiless and rigid; but do not mock at them, for they are signs of the life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone; a freedom of thought . . . which it must be the first aim of all Europe at this day to regain for her children.²⁵¹

Ruskin’s belief in the superiority of Gothic art and architecture in large part stemmed from his distaste for modern methods of production which he believed degraded the modern workman as well as the products of modern manufacture.

table between them, lend the photograph an air of desperation. While Munthe appears at ease, Sigrun appears rather ready to escape. Such an interpretation certainly arises from the knowledge that the two did not enjoy a happy marriage.

²⁵⁰ Some scholars have argued that Morris has been given too much credit for his contributions to “design reform” and that the idea of improving society with good design really came into prominence through the work of Henry Cole and the establishment of the South Kensington Museum, now the Victoria and Albert Museum. See Gere and Hoskins, 35.

²⁵¹ Joan Evans ed., John Ruskin, *The Lamp of Beauty: Writings on Art* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1959, 1995), 261.

In line with Ruskin's ideology, the Arts and Crafts movement, with William Morris as one of its main proponents, promoted integrating art and beauty into everyday life through well-designed home furnishings. In designing and making these objects, Morris encouraged the use of indigenous materials, crafting objects by hand, and called for a unity and equality amongst the arts.²⁵² Modern industry and manufacturing deeply troubled Morris, who found inspiration for his theories and practice in medieval art and architecture and the theoretical propositions of his contemporaries, including Ruskin.²⁵³ Rather than celebrating the industrial production of goods for the home, which the industrial revolution had made possible, Morris felt that mechanized production largely left people unhappy and unsatisfied in their labors. Morris also believed that the products of mass production possessed an inferior and ugly quality that modern people should not accept as worthy of their homes.

Morris' appreciation of the Middle Ages also included an interest in Nordic designs and motifs, which he adapted and used freely in his own work.²⁵⁴ His *Peacock and Dragon* pattern (fig. 3.9) demonstrates the diverse medley of his interests. In this textile design, Morris incorporates a stylized dragon, with a strangely contorted and curved body, into a two-dimensional floriated pattern. The titular peacock perches on a

²⁵² Wendy Kaplan ed., *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Europe and America: Design for the Modern World* (New York: Thames & Hudson in association with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2004), 11. See also Blakesley, 7-9. Morris's call for equality required bringing fine art and decorative art onto the same plane. In the European art world, decorative art remained less than fine art as a result of the hierarchy set forth in the Royal Academies in the seventeenth century. For more on this see Linda Parry, *Textiles of the Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988), 9-15.

²⁵³ For more on the theoretical underpinnings of the Arts and Crafts movement and William Morris in particular see Blakesley, 27-51.

²⁵⁴ Stephan Tschudi Madsen, "Morris and Munthe" *Journal of the William Morris Society* (1964): 34. It is not my purpose here to locate specific points of origin for different artistic theories or motifs, but rather to argue that theories and images participate in a larger process of exchange, imagination, adaptation and repetition that often remains untraceable.

branch below, its feathered body, like the dragon's, made to conform to the needs of the textile pattern, those being the needs of the craftsman, rather than the dictates of nature. Morris' use of the dragon and peacock speak to his awareness of artistic trends, the dragon in particular had experienced increased popularity in Norway during the nineteenth century as a symbol of national pride, while the peacock had become emblematic of the Aesthetic movement.

Morris borrowed from and imagined the life of the medieval craftsman in the development of his design theories and practices, which, much like folktales, rely upon borrowings and reinterpretations for their continuing existence. Moreover, like folklore, Morris' call for a change in the manufacture of goods needed to be shared in order to succeed, his call could not be answered if it was not shared with others. His veneration of medieval craftsmen, which guided his design aesthetic, parallels Munthe's veneration and idealization of the Norwegian peasant. Morris, Ruskin, and adherents to the Arts and Crafts movement crafted a story of modern decorative art that depended on the existence of modern factory laborers, and the notion that their work, though new and modern was lacking. Morris found the remedy for this modern lack in an idealization of the labors and lifestyle of medieval craftsmen. Morris did not eschew industrial manufacture entirely, but used it selectively to serve the needs of his business, which emphasized medieval tradition and simple craftsmanship as the basis for his modern designs.

Morris' theories and practices also address the concerns of the mid-to-late nineteenth-century art world in Europe and respond to anxieties about modern life,

particularly urbanization and industrialization. Munthe, who was keenly aware of the efforts of Morris, likely through the Arts and Crafts magazine *The Studio*, participated in this same artistic community.²⁵⁵ As designers, Morris and Munthe both promoted harmony between the seemingly dialectical nature of the old and new. Morris, inspired by his understanding of the medieval craftsman and repulsed by modern industrial design, promoted himself as the purveyor of good design for modern life in England. Likewise, in Norway, Munthe presented himself as the man to renew, revitalize, and monumentalize Norwegian design. Morris rejected what he found to be the ugly ornament and lack of quality that modern industry produced, along with the way in which industry dehumanized the working class, and instead celebrated the meticulous craftsmanship of the medieval period. However, in order to combat the new modes and products of manufacture that he found odious, he relied upon his own ability to design something new and imagined the proper life for the craftsmen who would carry out his designs. Munthe attempted to bring modernity to Norway through his nationalistic imagining of Norwegian history and idealization of peasant life.²⁵⁶ Rather than rejecting the insidious influences of machine-made goods, Munthe focused his efforts on defining and promoting Norwegian-ness while rejecting foreign intrusions. Due to slower economic growth during the nineteenth century, Norway had not experienced the same

²⁵⁵ Clive Ashwin, "The Nordic Connection: Aspects of Interchange between Britain and Scandinavia (1875-1930)" *Studio International* vol 195.no 997 (1982): 20-25.

²⁵⁶ It is worth noting that Stephan Tschudi Madsen considers the relationship between the two artists in his article "Morris and Munthe" *Journal of the William Morris Society* (1964): 34-40. Madsen spends most of the article arguing that Munthe is national and Morris universal. While Madsen's ideas are not of particular use for my purposes, his analysis offers another point of view.

level of industrial production as Britain, and therefore, there was little need to reject mass-manufactured goods.²⁵⁷

Based upon similar ideals as those Morris and Munthe espoused, *art nouveau*, as a style and movement, carries similar contradictions with it as the Arts and Crafts movement and the theories and practices of Morris and Munthe. As Paul Greenhalgh explains in *The Essence of Art Nouveau* “The defining characteristic of Art Nouveau – the factor that made it into an intellectually and socially cohesive force – was modernity.”²⁵⁸ Greenhalgh’s definition, while vague, is useful, and demonstrates the style’s close ties with the Arts and Crafts movement, which pledged to provide good and beautiful designs for modern life.²⁵⁹ Similarly, artists working in the modern *art nouveau* style called for equality across art forms, so that there no longer would be a separation between “high” and “low,” or “fine” and “decorative” art. One of the first *art nouveau* artists to set forth such an idea in writing was Belgian architect and designer Henry van de Velde, whose 1895 comments echo Morris:

It is important to note that all terminology, like low art, art of second rank, art industry, decorative art and arts and crafts are only valid as long as one agrees to them. . . . We can’t allow a split which aims at single-mindedly ranking one art

²⁵⁷ Kokkin, 51.

²⁵⁸ Paul Greenhalgh, *The Essence of Art Nouveau* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 2000), 8.

²⁵⁹ I also would like to point out the way in which Greenhalgh’s definition of *art nouveau* mirrors Eric Hobsbawm’s definition of the nation in *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, which I discuss in chapter two. “The basic characteristic of the modern nation and everything connected with it is its modernity.” Hobsbawm, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 14.

above the others, a separation of the arts into high art and a second class, low industrial art.”²⁶⁰

Van de Velde rejects class warfare in the realm of the arts, arguing that artists should not accept the standing division between high and low art, but rather should promote all forms as on the same plane. Paradoxically, this revolutionary design movement, which supposedly embodied and represented newness, modern life and industry, and called for equality drew upon history and depended upon an established refinement of taste. The vagueness of Greenhalgh’s definition attests to the fact that *art nouveau* persists as a broad classification, encompassing a wide array of artists as well as design styles, each supposedly inspired by and reflective of modernity. However, those who celebrated, designed, and promoted *art nouveau* relied upon their imagination of what modern life should be at the turn of the century. Moreover, the *art nouveau* design aesthetic depends upon a multitude of borrowings from the past in the effort to create an art representative of the time period. As Stephan Tschudi Madsen explains in his foundational text on the sources of *art nouveau* “it was Historicism which indirectly gave rise to the new style.”²⁶¹

Further demonstrating the contradictory and vague characterization of *art nouveau*, Greenhalgh also states “It was a complicated style for a complicated age, when many contrary forces were forced to live together: the old and the new, the city and country, science and religion, the individual and the community, the local and the

²⁶⁰ Quoted in Greenhalgh, 13.

²⁶¹ Stephan Tschudi Madsen, *Sources of Art Nouveau* (New York: G. Wittenborn, 1956), 84-5.

cosmopolitan.”²⁶² In his effort to define *art nouveau* beyond “modernity,” Greenhalgh emphasizes the nebulous and expansive character of this style that encompassed seemingly contrary forces. These forces beg for further engagement, and fortunately, within Greenhalgh’s inventory of the style, he offers the perfect trope with which to engage them. The whiplash curve, which features prominently in *art nouveau* objects and interiors (figs. 3.11-3.13), serves as an ideal metaphor for contemplating the way in which the style is “complicated.”²⁶³ The curve is intricately embroidered in Hermann Obrist’s *Whiplash* textile (fig. 3.11), is stenciled on the wall and ceiling of Victor Horta’s *Tassel House* (fig. 3.12), is rendered as hair in Munthe’s painting (fig. 1.8), and carved out of wood in Hector Guimard’s furniture designs (fig. 3.13). The characteristic curve goes in one direction and then another, finding itself beautifully and deliberately tangled. The entanglement of the whiplash curve better expresses the sense of coming together or complication that troubles Greenhalgh. The forces he describes as “contrary” and “forced to live together” are in fact symptomatic and characteristic of modernity.

Much like the distinctive whiplash curve, modernity and folklore depend upon the past (the old) and the present (the new) coming together. The telling of a folktale invites the audience, present in two ways, into a tale that supposedly has happened at some point in the past. The storyteller shares the tale in order to teach the audience a lesson or convey a message that remains useful or relevant in the present. Folktales and

²⁶² Greenhalgh, 21.

²⁶³ Greenhalgh includes these examples in his book as well. The “whiplash” curve became ever more popular through the work of the German designer Hermann Obrist. Obrist designed a set of embroideries in 1895, one of which featured the curve that would become emblematic of the style. See Greenhalgh, 15.

storytellers freely combine real and imagined events, and engage with the past in order to understand the present. This overlap creates a sense of claustrophobia; things are not as distinct, divisible, and categorical as the organization of an exhibition or progressive historical narrative might make it seem.

The folkloric character of modern design trends shows itself again by way of *japonisme*. After a failed effort in 1853, the American Commodore Matthew Perry returned to Japan in 1854 and forced open the ports to trade, causing a flood of Japanese artworks and everyday objects to find their way into places long unfamiliar with Japan, including the West.²⁶⁴ This influx of fascinating foreign objects caused a sensation in Europe and led to an obsession with all things Japanese.²⁶⁵ Artists, including Munthe (and fellow Norwegian artists, such as Christian and Oda Krohg), but perhaps more famously Claude Monet, James Abbott McNeill Whistler, Henri Toulouse-Lautrec,

²⁶⁴The construction and imagining of the Western world is troublesome and is not going away anytime soon, as evidenced by Niall Ferguson's book *Civilization: The West and the Rest* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), which is based on the problematic premise that the West is the best and has been for centuries, but now is in decline. I use "the West" here because I find it useful in the context of the nineteenth century, not because I endorse the way in which it imagines and aggrandizes part of the world and marginalizes other parts.

²⁶⁵Japan's Tokugawa shogunate severely limited trade with Europe in the seventeenth century after an undesirable influx of European religious missionaries began entering the country. For more on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century trade between Japan and European countries see Monika Bincsik "European Collectors and Japanese Merchants of Lacquer in 'Old Japan'" *Journal of the History of Collections* v20.n2 (2008): 217-236. After the reopening of the ports in the mid-nineteenth century, Japanese exports did not find their way to Europe alone, and although *japonisme* is chiefly situated in the context of a European and American fascination with Japan, and sometimes a Japanese interest in the West, I would like to point out that it extends far beyond these constraints. Although it is not my intent to explore the global interest in Japan during the second half of the nineteenth century, it is important to note. For more on *japonisme*, see Gabriel P. Weisberg et al., *The Orient Expressed: Japan's Influence of Western Art 1854-1918* (Seattle; London: Mississippi Museum of Art Jackson in association with University of Washington Press, 2011), Gabriel P. Weisberg, Edwin Becker and Evelyne Possémé, *The Origins of l'art nouveau: the Bing Empire* (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum; Paris: Musée des arts décoratifs; Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 2004), and Siegfried Wichmann, *Japonisme: the Japanese Influence on Western Art Since 1858* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1981). For the Japanese side of the matter see Sara Cody, et al, eds., *Japan Goes to the World's Fairs: Japanese Art at the Great Expositions in Europe and the United States 1867-1904* (Tokyo: NHK, and NHK Promotions Co., Ltd. in association with LACMA and the Tokyo National Museum, 2005).

Vincent van Gogh, Eduoard Manet, and Paul Gauguin, among others, took particular interest in Japanese woodblock prints and other cultural ephemera and decorative objects such as fans, kimonos, parasols, ceramics, metalwork, and folding screens that made their way to Europe as a result of Perry's imperialist gesture. With the aid of these objects, artists, who found themselves fascinated by the people who used and made these items, imagined what it was like to be Japanese (figs. 3.14-3.15). Both Whistler and Manet relied upon the figure of a woman when envisioning their Japanese dreams. Wrapping her in ornately decorated Japanese robes and surrounding her with prints, screens, and/or fans, she became a part of a decorative fantasy of Japanese-ness. The objects and artworks offered the potential to escape into another world, a potential that proved alluring as well as anxiety-producing.

Moreover, the style of the prints, most of which were from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, differed dramatically in style to the artworks familiar to Western artists. Based on the stylistic qualities of the prints, many of these artists imagined their Japanese counterparts as simple and thoughtful people dedicated to the careful observation of life and nature. Munthe, and other modern artists, assumed that objects could teach them about an entire group of people, and that these once distant people could be known and understood easily.²⁶⁶ The two-dimensional treatment of space, the minimal and careful use of line in creating a representation, the juxtaposition of colorful patterns and the themes of nature and everyday life which feature

²⁶⁶ Munthe close colleagues also participated in the imagining of Japan, including Christian and Oda Krohg, and Harriet Backer. For more on Munthe's fellow Norwegian artists, see Oscar Thue, *Christian Krohg* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1997), Anne Wichstrøm, *Oda Krohg: et kunstnerliv* (Helsinki: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1988), and Marit Ingeborg Lange, *Harriet Backer* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1995).

prominently in Japanese woodblock prints (figs. 3.16-3.17) led nineteenth-century artists to their theories and imaginings about Japan. Artists attempted to duplicate the style, master it, and eventually incorporate aspects of what they deemed useful into their own artistic endeavors. Although based on an admiration of the achievements of Japanese artists, *japonisme* does not embrace Japan, but rather imagines a Japan, which fascinates and mystifies. In this colorful imagining, Japan remains distant, different, and mesmerizing, and yet Japan can be imagined close at hand and can be brought to life anywhere through the aid of objects and artworks. In this imaging, the Japanese artist is not dissimilar from the medieval/modern craftsman or the Norwegian peasant.

While Munthe had an interest in the stylistic qualities of Japanese art, he found the way in which the art became tied to Japanese national identity of particular note. Writing in 1898 about the values in art, Munthe emphasized the virtues of national expression in Japanese art, noting “It is precisely an artist’s national perspective that attracts and has meaning for us when we see something that we recognize as art, whether it be from a foreign country or from our own. . . the artistic conceptualization of the Japanese is the most national force that has found its way into art in recent times.”²⁶⁷ Munthe’s understanding of the Japanese as leaders in nation-making through displays of their visual and material culture led him to emulate the efforts of the

²⁶⁷ Munthe goes on to argue that it makes sense to place Japanese art in “high esteem,” and that artists should learn from it, but not adopt this “foreign” style because it will not translate well into another nation’s art. Gerhard Munthe, Marion Nelson trans., “Kunstværdier” from *Minder og Meninger* (Kristiania: Albert Cammermeyers Forlag, 1919), available at The Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum Library, 67-77.

Japanese exposition preparation office.²⁶⁸

By strategically participating in World's Fairs and structuring a narrative of the Japanese nation that capitalized on the economic benefits of the fascination with their nation, Japan's culture-makers promoted Japan as a nation with a rich and beautiful history. The Japanese government realized the importance of self-representation on the stage of international exhibitions after Fuchibe Tokuzō, a Japanese official visited the Second International Exposition, held at Kensington Garden, in 1862. While Japan had not participated in the exposition, a large array of Japanese objects from the collection of Sir Rutherford Alcock, the first British consul-general to Japan, were displayed in the "Japanese Court" (fig. 3.18). Fuchibe's recorded impression of the display as "a jumbled mess resembling a curiosity shop" likely encouraged the Japanese government that participating in these large international exhibitions would allow them to exercise some control over Japan's national representation abroad.²⁶⁹ For the 1878 Paris exposition, the French government invited the Japanese government to organize its own display.²⁷⁰ The Japanese government's arrangement of antique Japanese wares was shown alongside displays of Japanese art from European collectors, such as Siegfried Bing, Philippe Burty, and Emile Guimet. In order to maintain control of the narrative associated with this display, the Japanese government published an explanatory almanac in French, in which Japanese history and art making were detailed and

²⁶⁸ Sara Cody et al, 20 and 24. Japan's exposition preparation office was established in 1872. The Tokyo National Museum is a descendent of this office.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 16-18.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 38.

explained.²⁷¹ The year before Japan's participation in the 1878 Paris fair, the city of Tokyo hosted Japan's First National Industrial Exhibition. One of the government's stated goals was encouraging the growth of export industries.²⁷² However, thirteen years later, at the Third National Exhibition in 1890, the judges lamented that too much focus had been placed on making export wares that catered to Western tastes, and as a result, Japan's decorative art production had descended into vulgarity.²⁷³ Perhaps due to the judges' lamentations, that same year the Imperial artisan system was established in Japan. This new system "encouraged the preservation of traditional decorative arts techniques" that is to say techniques that did not necessarily appeal to the Western imagining of and desire for Japan.²⁷⁴

The imagining and construction of the Japanese nation in Europe and Japan parallels the kind of imagining that took place in Norway as nationalists constructed Norwegian history and identity. The seemingly distant past of the Viking age appealed to nationalists, and could be recreated in the present moment through artifacts brought to the foreground of public interest with the unearthing of Viking ships, and also the writing of Norway's history, which P. A. Munch had gone about only recently. Munthe's tapestries, and the stories they tell, also bring Norwegian history close to the viewer and into the present.²⁷⁵ Folklore and folktales encourage the collapse of time and

²⁷¹ Ibid, 42.

²⁷² Ibid, 46-48.

²⁷³ Ibid, 54.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, 58.

²⁷⁵ This history was also brought into the present in 1893 at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago when Norway sailed a replica of an excavated Viking ship to the exhibition and docked it on the bank of Lake Michigan. See, Ethan Robey, "Kings, Peasants, Dragons, and Flowers: National Symbolism in Decorative Arts at the World's Fairs" in *Inventing the Modern World: Decorative Arts at the World's*

space, much like *japonisme*. Moreover, folktales rely on the continued intertwining of stories and reinterpretations across time and space to perpetuate their existence.

Japonisme relied upon the use of objects in imagining the nation and thus provided a model for Munthe's efforts on behalf of Norway. However, despite the seeming closeness achieved by imagining Japan, it is important to remember that a significant part of the desire to bring Japan close is tied to the ever-present problems of colonialism and imperialism. The imagined Japan became the domain of those who imagined it, and although objects brought the fantasy into physical contact with those interested in the different and exotic wares from an unfamiliar land, these imaginings also helped to manage the anxiety about the potential closeness of an unknown place and unknown people, and made them known through the means at hand. As a part of this imagining process, an uncertainty arises about the imagined and the real, along with a discomfort with the violability and permeability of national borders; both of which preoccupied nationalists.

The Japanese government saw the potential to negotiate the Western perception of Japanese nationhood through displays at national and international exhibitions, and recognized that the creation of an associated historical narrative to accompany the display of objects allowed them to participate in crafting the perception of the Japanese nation. The display of historic works of art alongside more contemporary products appealed to the nineteenth-century taste in Europe for seemingly historical styles as well as methods of production that bore the aura of tradition or time-honored practice.

Fairs, 1851-1939, Jason T. Busch and Catherine L. Futter, eds. (Pittsburgh; New York: The Carnegie Museum of Art in association with Rizzoli, 2012), 181.

Munthe similarly recognized the importance of displaying the nation for local and international audiences, as evidenced in the display of his tapestries at the Paris 1900 exhibition and his design and installation work at the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design (figs. 1.7 and 1.9).²⁷⁶

Although seemingly less focused on the nation, Symbolism, like *japonisme*, the Arts and Crafts movement, and the Aesthetic movement, depends on the modern as well as the mythic past in the construction of nebulous and tenuous narratives and images.²⁷⁷ In the introduction to her book *Symbolist Art in Context*, Michelle Facos describes the two chief characteristics of Symbolist art as the artist's desire to represent ideas, and the "manipulation of color, form and composition that signals the artist's relative indifference to worldly appearances."²⁷⁸ Facos' broad understanding of Symbolist art easily includes Munthe's tapestries and she discusses his work in her chapter titled "National Romanticism." Rudolph Rapetti takes a slightly different approach toward defining Symbolism, asserting "[I]t is impossible to reduce Symbolism to the concerns of a given national school, or even to a group of artists with a shared historic trajectory. Here we must be content to assert that Symbolism's realm of development coincided with the industrialized West . . ."²⁷⁹ Like Facos, Rapetti opts for a broad understanding of Symbolism, and he also contextualizes it within the history of modern industry. Rapetti further explains that Symbolist art alludes to intangible ideas, arguing

²⁷⁶ For more on this see chapter one.

²⁷⁷ Michelle Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 9. Facos asserts that Symbolism begins with the publication of Jean Moréas' 1886 manifesto in *Le Figaro*.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 1.

²⁷⁹ Rodolphe Rapetti and Deke Dusinberre, trans., *Symbolism* (Paris, Flammarion, 2005), 14.

“Symbolism brought to mythological subjects, which had been sidelined by the Romantics, an approach that minimized their strictly narrative aspect in favor of a vision that brought underlying aspects to light.”²⁸⁰ Facos elaborates upon these “underlying aspects” and emphasizes the important role of the artist as an individual who can offer insight into the human condition and point viewers of art toward immaterial ideas.²⁸¹

Symbolism flourished as an artistic movement during the second half of the nineteenth century, the same time as universal expositions came to popularity. As detailed in chapter one, these large scale exhibitions relied upon the nation for their organization and sought to construct proper citizens and people. Rapetti makes note of the relationship between Symbolist art and the exhibition, arguing:

[Symbolism’s] birth and growth were contemporary with the phenomenon of universal expositions, employed to assert military and economic might from a standpoint that combined technological progress with an appropriation of traditional culture, which was perceived as the specific expression of a given nation.²⁸²

Not surprisingly, Rapetti and Facos note the potential usefulness of Symbolism for artists concerned with building a national identity. Facos asserts “In the absence of proven formulas to stimulate national identity, artists experimented with a variety of approaches to communicate effectively with particular target audiences, focusing on

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 212.

²⁸¹ Facos, 13 and 30.

²⁸² Rapetti and Dusinger, 10.

history, legend, and landscape.”²⁸³ Rapetti’s comments reinforce her argument, although he uses different terminology: “At a time when art was curbed by censorship, depictions of virgin nature assumed political significance: they symbolized a land still marked by its original roots, where nation and myth were one.”²⁸⁴

Facos’ and Rapetti’s comments easily apply to an analysis of Munthe’s naturalistic landscape painting *Evening in Eggedal* (fig. 3.20), which represents Norway in just the fashion Rapetti describes, offering the landscape as vast and timeless, as an aspect of the newly awakened nation that had endured the trials of time. The rocky, uncultivated hills, populated by a single home convey a sense of endless continuity. Absent are any signs of modern life, rather Munthe celebrates the landscape and the intersecting lines made by the brook that cuts through the scene as well as a foot-worn path, fence, forest, and mountains. The house and two outbuildings, set off to the right in the middle of the painting, are small and peripheral to the overall image. Similarly, the manmade fence appears delicate testifying to the insignificance of humankind in the face of this time-tested terrain. The reddish-brown color of the buildings makes them stand out in the blue and green landscape, yet they appear to grow out of the ground like the trees and other vegetation that surround them, perhaps suggesting that the people of Norway are “rooted” in the land.²⁸⁵

While Munthe’s landscape painting aligns with Rapetti’s and Facos’ arguments about an emphasis on the national landscape, his tapestries (figs. 3.1 and 3.5) operate

²⁸³ Facos, 147.

²⁸⁴ Rapetti, 221.

²⁸⁵ Facos observes that the idea of “rootedness” plays an important role at the end of the nineteenth century, “Promoting rootedness was a fundamental objective of the idealistic school of Symbolism as it was for National Romanticism,” 149

within a different scheme of allusion. The people who inhabit the treacherously beautiful terrain of his paintings, like the terrain itself, have endured seemingly for centuries. These truly Norwegian people bear Norway's history, and thus, define the modern nation, through their ties to the land and their sharing of folktales. Within the tapestry designs, Munthe does not employ a realistic rendering of the Norwegian landscape to imagine national identity, but rather relies upon folklore to keep him rooted in "Norwegian-ness," while embracing imagined, stylized, and mythic worlds in his designs. The imagined folkloric world maintains a strange and parallel relationship with the world of the naturalistic landscape paintings and the imagined Norwegian nation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The national allusions Munthe's tapestries offer the viewer extend and extrapolate upon the allusions he makes in his landscape paintings. Munthe thus embraces the imaginative possibilities of folklore in order to better portray his vision of Norwegian national identity in the modern world.

Other artists, including Munthe's fellow countryman, Edvard Munch seized upon the allusive potential Symbolism offered them. Munch's famous painting *The Scream* (fig. 3.19) arguably depicts the depths of human despair, a sentiment expressed through the artist's dramatic juxtaposition of undulating reds, yellows, blues, and black as well as the dramatic face-grasping pose of the unidentifiable and abstracted individual whose gaping mouth emits the titular cry. Decidedly different from the work of Munthe, Munch's painting nevertheless fits within Symbolism, and thus participates in the repetitive folkloric narrative of modernity. The expressionistic use of color in the

painting makes Munch's work new and modern, and yet the way the image refers to profound human emotion, associating the turmoil of the figure with the surrounding landscape has precedent.

The move away from verisimilitude characterizes much of the work of Symbolist artists, as Facos argues "Rejecting realism and anti-illusionism are central to Symbolism."²⁸⁶ Although this does not describe Munthe's symbolist landscapes, it does indeed characterize his tapestries. This bold assertion ties into the arguments she and Rapetti make in their initial descriptions of Symbolism as rejecting positivism and the reigning prestige of the French "in the aftermath of the Enlightenment."²⁸⁷ Symbolism appears to have an anti-establishment bent based on Facos' and Rapetti's assessments, nevertheless, Symbolist art, including Munthe's tapestries, which reject realism and naturalism, and embrace the world of the imagination and dreams, remains useful for imagining and constructing nations, whether they be near or far. With nationhood being the prerequisite status needed for participation in universal expositions, even Symbolism cannot entirely reject the "enlightened" desire to organize and know empirically. It is therefore not a coincidence that Symbolism and world's fairs achieved popularity at the same moment in time, as both relied upon the ability of people to imagine based on visual clues.

Although Symbolism seems to reject and accept Enlightenment thought simultaneously, Munthe's use of folklore and its allusive potential remains undisciplined. Perhaps Munthe recognized the ability of folklore to do much more than

²⁸⁶ Facos, 2.

²⁸⁷ Rapetti, 7 and 230. See also Facos, 5.

give proof of the nation. Rather than understanding folklore to represent, necessarily, a true Norway, Munthe saw the potential folklore had to refer to concepts outside of the narrative of the story, much like the style of Munthe's designs, which rely on references pulled from numerous sources. Munthe borrows from different movements, styles, trends, and theories, and pieces together the bits and pieces as he sees fit. His work is imaginative and collaborative taking its cues from the repeated narratives of modern artistic movements.

Offering some insight into his personal understanding of the art-making process and modernity, Munthe writes "Art has always built on what preceded it and has also drawn nourishment from its own time. It is safe to say that no one creates anything that is completely of itself."²⁸⁸ Here Munthe appears to acknowledge the way in which his artistic practice operates. Although he does not name it as the folkloric, his description certainly relates to the way in which folklore borrows and circulates. Despite this acknowledgement, in the same treatise, Munthe goes on to extol the virtues of the national in art. He returns to and emphasizes the significance of the nation, even though he recognizes its faults, in order to bolster Norway's position as a modern participant in the international art world.

Munthe needs to keep telling the story of the nation, and his nation in particular in order to remain relevant and competitive in the context of the nineteenth-century. Without a national identity, Norway, a country so close to its continental European neighbors, ran the risk of becoming simply a Northern other or worse, being

²⁸⁸ Munthe, Nelson trans., 13.

incorporated into another nation's narrative.²⁸⁹ Munthe relied on the tapestries to tell the story of Norway as a modern nation, while the allusive potential of the folktales do so much more.

The folktales and their multiple versions and retellings betray the underlying anxieties that lead to the construction of national and international narratives. The narratives of the two folktale tapestries examined in this chapter express anxieties about identity and transformation in particular. The story of *Liti Kjersti* as depicted in Munthe's tapestry expresses a profound concern regarding the loss of an individual's identity and easy conversion into a new persona through the consumption of a foreign substance. With this story, Munthe's anxieties about the nation and his position as a national artist come to the fore for consideration. It is not unlikely that his reserved attitudes towards openly acknowledging his appreciation for modern international design trends reflects his worry that the consumption of too much non-Norwegian art might ultimately serve to strip him of his identity as a Norwegian artist. The tapestry thus engages with modern concerns about the need to define the self against the other at the heart of the national project, which defines identities and origins even if they are imagined. As I have demonstrated, the tapestries' strength lies in their ability to refer to narratives that question the imposed order of the exhibition, while seemingly fitting well within that system. All the stories rehearsed herein, particularly the stories of

²⁸⁹ Facos, 148.

modern artistic movements, persist as folktales, which continue to be retold and remade.²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ Ong's quotation about oral tradition seems apt here "In oral tradition, there will be as many minor variants of a myth as there are repetitions of it, and the number of repetitions can be increased indefinitely," 42.



Fig. 3.1 Gerhard Munthe, *Daughters of the Northern Lights*, designed 1892 (woven 1899)



Fig. 3.2 Japanese textile pattern from *Japanische Textilomamenten*, V, Berlin, 1892, Oslo Museum of Applied Art Library

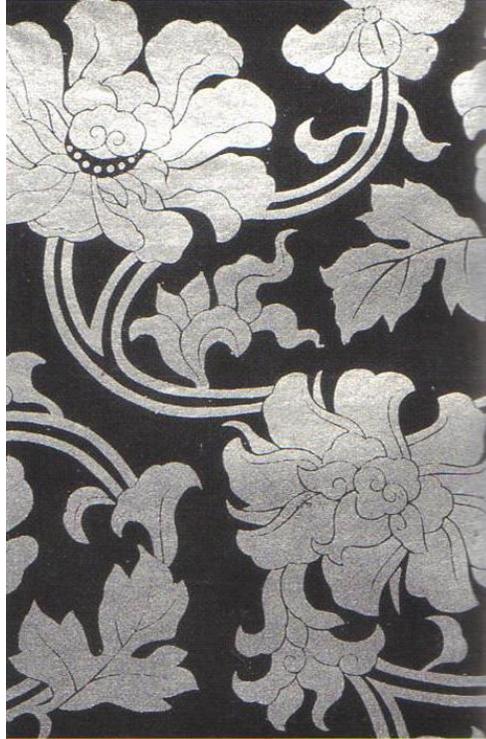


Fig. 3.3 Japanese textile design from *Japanische Textilomamenten, IV*, Berlin, 1892 (Oslo)

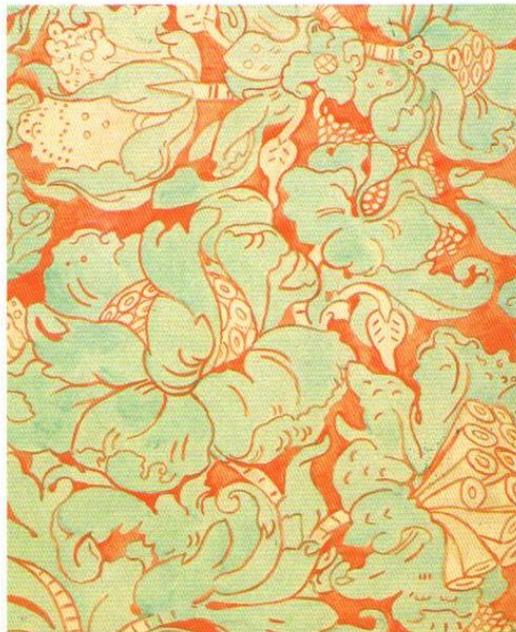


Fig. 3.4 Gerhard Munthe, *Silver Roses*, watercolor wallpaper pattern, 1896 (Oslo)

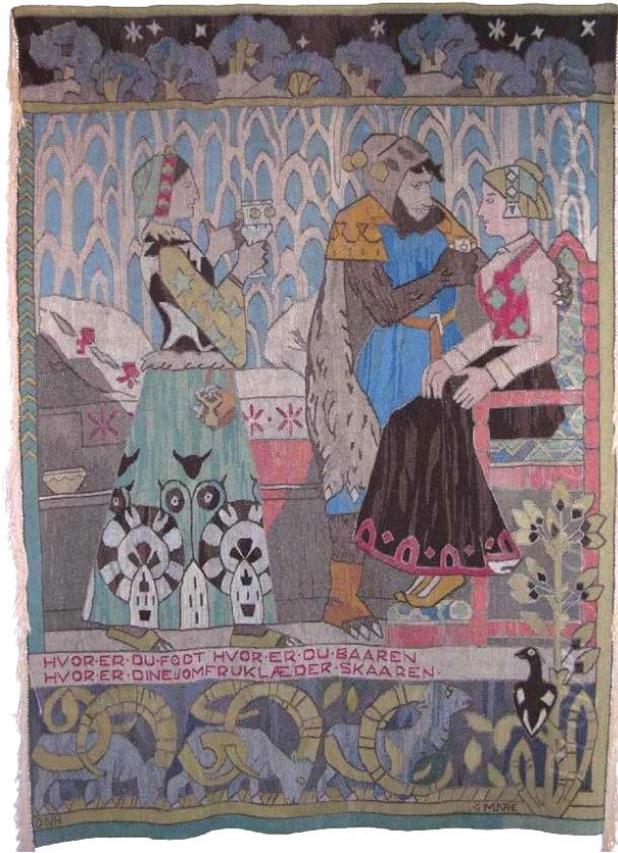


Fig. 3.5 Gerhard Munthe, *Little Kjersti*, c. 1900 (Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum)

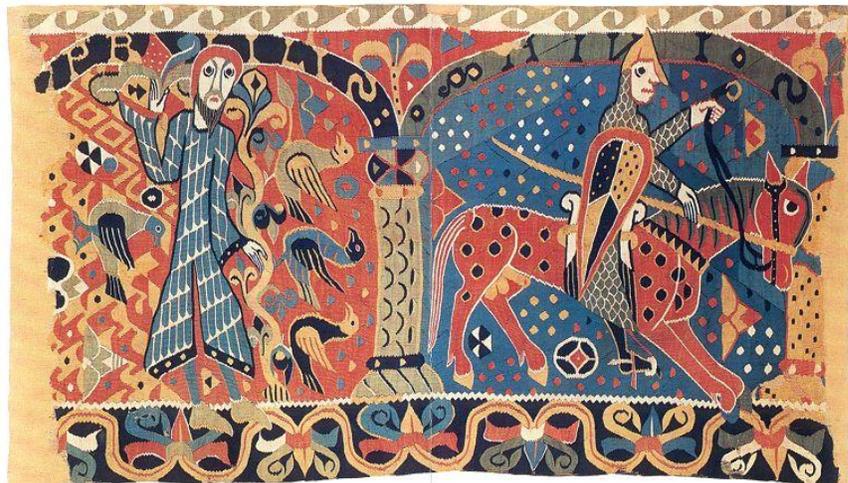


Fig. 3.6 Baldishol Tapestry, Norwegian, late twelfth century (Oslo)



Fig 3.7 Gerhard and Sigrun Munthe sitting in front of the fireplace, Leveld, Lysaker



Fig. 3.8 Gerhard Munthe, *Fire Play (Ildens lek)*, detail, 1914



Fig. 3.9 Gerhard Munthe, Chair for the *Fairytale Room* at the Holmenkollen Tourist Hotel, (designed 1896)

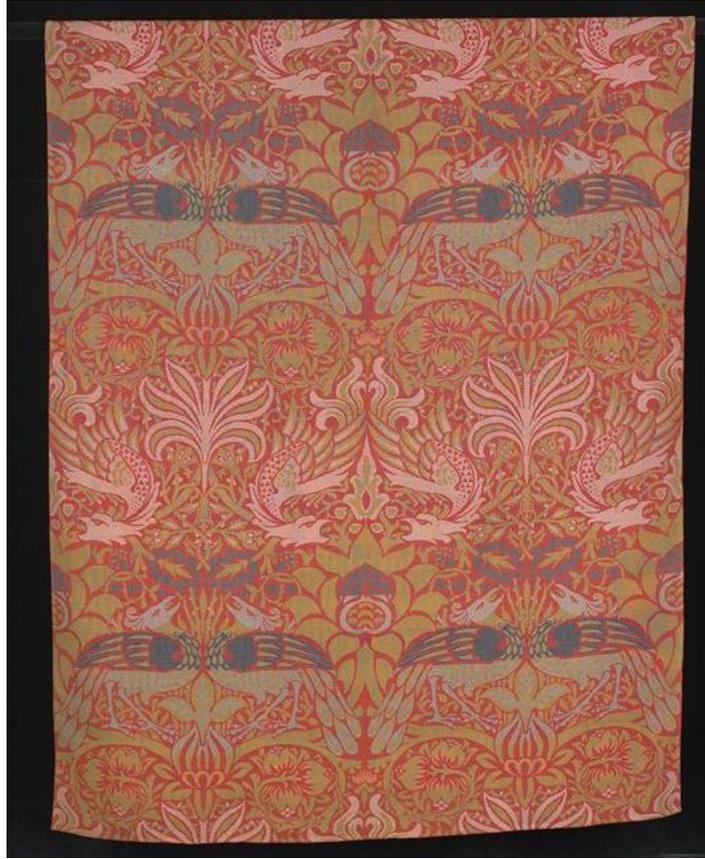


Fig. 3.10 William Morris, *Peacock and Dragon*, c. 1878



Fig. 3.11 Hermann Obrist, *Whiplash* textile (Peitschenhieb), c. 1895

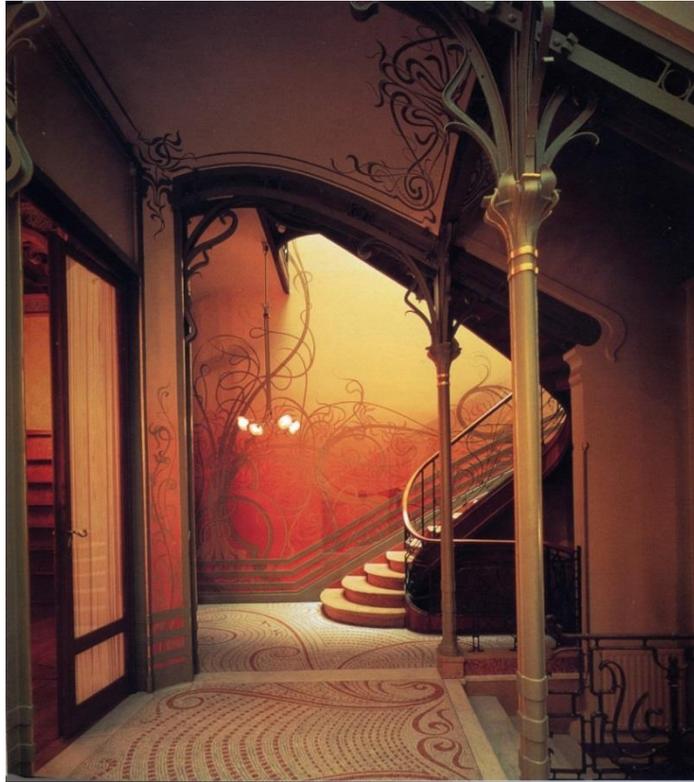


Fig. 3.12 Victor Horta, Tassel House, first floor interior view, 1893, Brussels

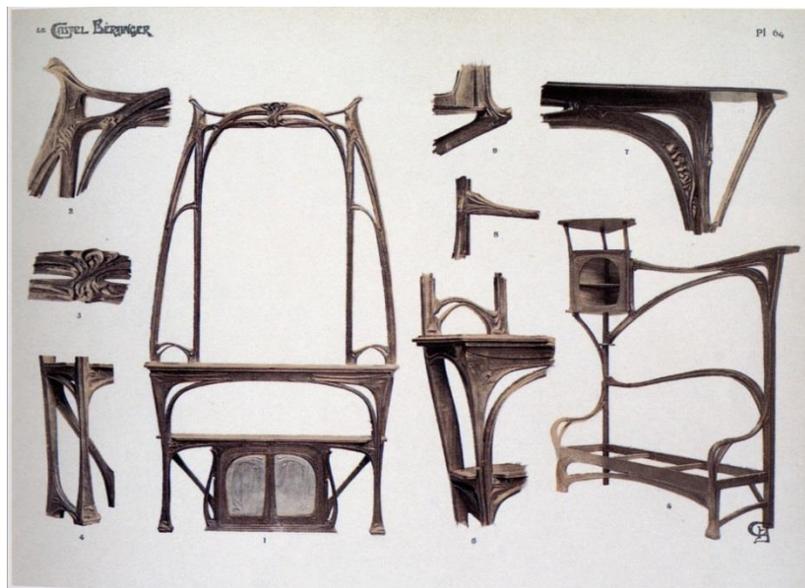


Fig. 3.13 Hector Guimard, Plate 64 from *Le Castel Béranger*, oeuvre de Hector Guimard, Architecte, 1898



Fig. 3.14 James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Caprice in Purple and Gold, No. 2: The Golden Screen*, 1864

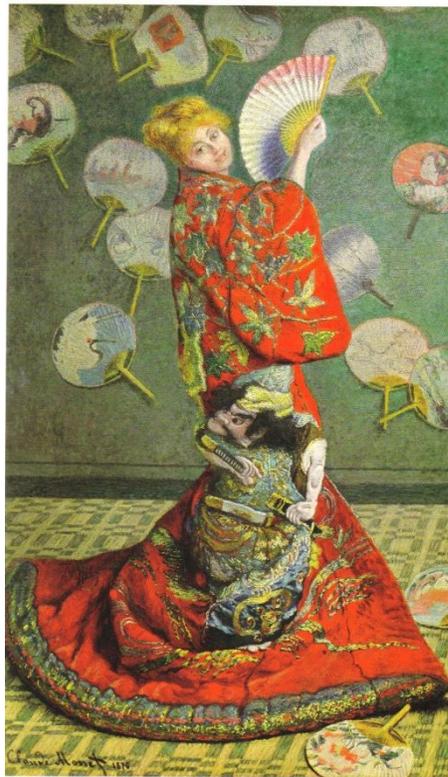


Fig. 3.15 Claude Monet, *La Japonaise (Madame Monet in a kimono)*, 1876



Fig. 3.16 Utagawa Kunisada, *The actor Onoe Kikujiro in the role of the maid Ohatsu in the play 'Kagamiyama Gonichi no ishibumi,' 1855*



Fig. 3.17 Kitagawa Utamaro, *The Courtesan Hinazaru at the Keizetsuru from Comparing the Charms of Beautiful Women, c.1794-5*



Fig. 3.18 The Japanese Court from the London International Exhibition of 1862

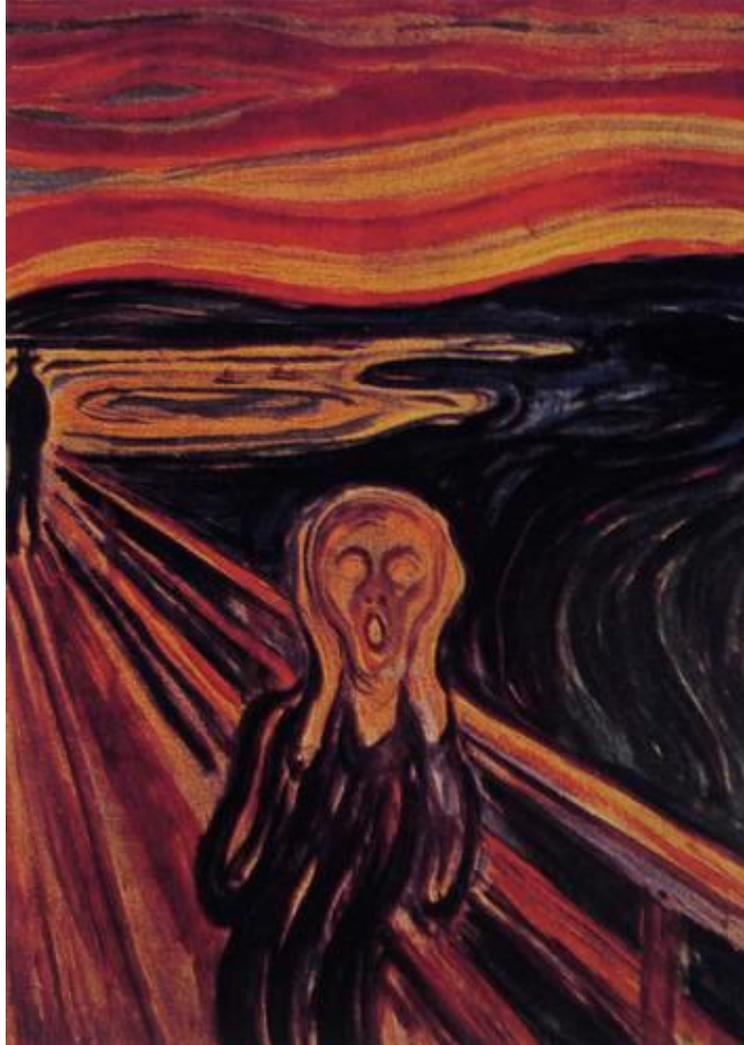


Fig. 3.19 Edvard Munch, *The Scream*, 1895

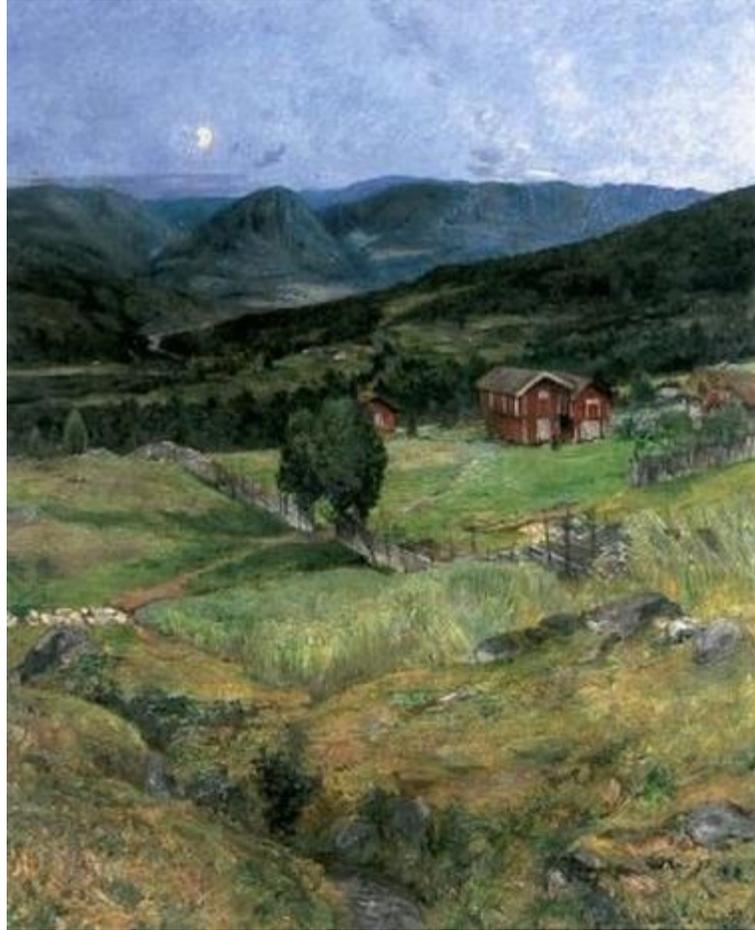


Fig. 3.20 Gerhard Munthe, *Aften i Eggedal (Evening in Eggedal)*, 1889

Conclusion: Looking Back Again

“He [Munthe] has regenerated our old Norwegian textile art with its rustic character of style and its vigorous, almost violent, colours to modern art, marked not only by the character of the people, but by individuality.”²⁹¹

Jens Thiis (1903)

“Craft-artists have recognized the exotic aspects of their own culture. Old local techniques and the use of traditional materials have been revived and transformed into a modern style which today has been refined into art of the highest quality.”²⁹²

Widar Halén (2002)

In considering the work of contemporary Norwegian craft artists, Halén describes their practice using language that has a strikingly similar tone and vocabulary to Thiis’ explanation of Munthe’s tapestries a hundred years prior. The desire to tie the present to the past and the old to the new appear impossible to escape. The similarities in their descriptions suggest that ideas about Norwegian decorative arts and design set forth in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in discussions of Munthe’s

²⁹¹ Jens Thiis, “The Museum of Applied Art at Trondhjem,” *Museums Journal* (March 1904): 283, reprinted in Opstad, Jan-Lauritz. *Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseums Vævskole og Atelier for Kunstvævning 1898-1909* (Trondheim: Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum, 1983): 38-43.

²⁹² Widar Halén, “Neo-Tradition: A Nordic Case Study” in *The Persistence of Craft: The Applied Arts Today*, Paul Greenhalgh ed., (London; New Brunswick: A & C Black; Rutgers University Press, 2002), 138.

tapestries established a way of thinking about Norwegian craft and design that persists. Although Hilmar Bakken noted that Munthe's work no longer had popular appeal in the mid twentieth century, when Scandinavian modern design - well-exemplified in the works of Danish designer Arne Jacobsen – pervaded the design narrative, more recent scholarship illustrates that Munthe's anxious positioning of himself as a Norwegian artist resonates in discussions of contemporary craft. Ideas about craft, traditions, and history remain intertwined when distinguishing Norwegian artists and their works in the contemporary moment.

One of the reasons for reusing the language deployed a century earlier might be attributable to the difficulties Norway faced in the first half of the twentieth century. Norway, a financially poor nation in comparison to Sweden and Denmark in the nineteenth century, remained poor after national independence in 1905. Although Scandinavian design became quite popular internationally at mid-century, Norwegian artists and designers did not make as strong of a showing on the international stage as their Danish counterparts. With the discovery of oil in the North Sea in the 1960s, Norwegian domestic industry focused on the nation's oil production rather than innovations in design.²⁹³ While this decision certainly benefitted the Norwegian economy in the long run, providing an enviable government financial surplus, it also led to a seeming stagnation of Norwegian art and design. Halén reminds the reader of the uphill battle Norwegians faced in terms of industrialization, asserting “Art-industry and industrial design still has a rather weak position in Norway, compared to other Northern

²⁹³ Raul Cabra and Katherine E. Nelson, eds., *New Scandinavian Design* (San Francisco; Vancouver: Chronicle Books; Raincoast Books, 2004): 107-110.

European countries. Our craft milieu, on the other hand, has remained strong and vibrant and it was natural to turn to the old craft traditions for a renewal of Norwegian arts and crafts.”²⁹⁴ Rather than spending time lamenting the status of Norway’s industrial design, Halén instead points to Norway’s enduring and strong craft tradition, a tradition that nineteenth-century nationalists called upon as well.

Halén’s explanation of Norwegian craft and industry allows him to embrace the special Norwegian-ness of the contemporary craft scene, and he concludes his assessment of the “neo-traditionalists” remarking, “Rarely has tradition been so innovative.”²⁹⁵ Whether deliberate or inadvertent, Halén’s framing of these contemporary artists closely mimics the construction of Norwegian national identity in the nineteenth century, when nationalists embraced the peasant as emblematic of Norwegian-ness. Here, he takes a step away from the peasant and focuses instead on craft traditions as the precedent and point of legitimation for this contemporary national flourishing.

However, the craft tradition in Norway did not carry the strength and vibrancy Halén associates with it in the nineteenth century. In discussing Norwegian craft traditions, Thiis paints a more precarious picture, stating:

[O]ur national peasants’ art has had its flourishing ages. . . . But from the beginning of the nineteenth century this Norwegian peasants’ art or domestic industry fell into decay. The manufacturing industry made its way into our valleys and spoiled the manual skill as well as the design. The foreign

²⁹⁴ Halén, 138.

²⁹⁵ Halén, 148.

manufacturing industry became victorious over the national domestic industry. And not until late did we comprehend that national values were lost here which we could not afford to lose, national and aesthetic values.²⁹⁶

This's description of the relationship between "this Norwegian peasants' art," or "domestic industry" as he calls it, and manufacturing, or "foreign industry," during the nineteenth century still depends on the peasant to legitimate a "decayed" national craft tradition. However, This's efforts in promoting weaving effectively produced "domestic industry" or craft as Norwegian heritage. Halén ably capitalizes on the groundwork This and Munthe laid by way of their "recovery" of domestic industry.

The comparison between Halén and This reinforces the need for a clearer understanding of the role that decorative arts and design played and continue to play in the construction of Norwegian national identity. I have endeavored to contribute to this understanding by examining Munthe's folktale tapestries and demonstrating that they participate in the construction of the national narrative while also questioning nationhood and calling attention to the repetitive and contradictory demands of modernity and the nation. In the end, I must return to Goulish's aperture, and acknowledge that in looking from the outside in, the view is inherently limited.²⁹⁷ We all see something different of the fragmented performance, and use that to construct an understanding and interpretation of what that performance may have entailed.

²⁹⁶ This, 281-82.

²⁹⁷ See the introduction, 1-2.

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