‘His name is man!’

The chieftain hero as type and topos in Norway around 1900

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ABSTRACT  With a historical and cultural approach to literature and poetry, Claudi demonstrates the English writer Thomas Carlyle’s influence on individual authors, e.g. Kristofer Uppdal, but also how it inspired a collective of poets, including Tore Ørjasæter and Olav Nygard. Claudi indicates that such an individual and person-oriented progressive movement as the chief cult eventually came into discredit in the wake of both World War II and changed conceptions in modern research of how history develops.

KEY WORDS  chief cult | chieftain | heroism | honour

When Arne Garborg dies in January 1924, Uppdal writes an obituary in the magazine Syn og segn. The obituary is in prose, but Uppdal also writes a version of it in verse. Odd Solumsmoen includes this poem in his 1963 collection of Uppdal’s posthumous poetry titled Hestane mine [My horses]. Here it is:

Hovding,
kvass,
og fårleg for uvener!

Sanningsleitar.
Og aldri undan du rygde i reddhug,
um på livet laust det bar,
du sa frå, når eit ord skulde segjast.

Du, den trauste og ærlege stridsmann,
verd å bli lik,
deg, stridsmann, elskar eg,
i kjærleik

1. This article is translated by Richard Burgess.
lik dei som glad og stolt fylgjer hovdingen sin i dauden.
Eg minnest frå mine barndoms og ungdoms år den døkke tonen din mot meg, som ropa, ja ropa på meg òg. Til eg måtte koma. Og eg kom.

Eg har høyrd mælet ditt, gjenom min eigen strid, når eg har vore nær å orvonast, og har då mintest striden din.

Ein takk frå meg! i denne herdsleblåe edeltistel eg legg ned.

(Updval 1963: 41–42)

[Chieftain, sharp, and dangerous for enemies!]

Truth-seeker. You never backed off in fear, though life was at stake, you spoke out, when a word needed to be spoken.

You, the reliable and honest warrior, worth emulating, you, warrior, I love, in love like those that happily and proudly follow their chieftain unto death. I remember from the years of my childhood and youth your dark tone towards me, that summoned, yes, summoned me too. Until I had to come. And I came.

I have heard your voice, through my own struggle, when I have been close to despair, and have remembered your struggle.
I thank you! 
with this hard-blue thistle that I lay down.]

The poem is Uppdal’s eulogy to one of his greatest heroes, so naturally the poem aims to describe the greatness of the deceased. But the way Uppdal canonises his poetic hero may seem odd. The poem opens by characterising Garborg as ‘kvass’ [sharp] and ‘farleg’ [dangerous]. The first adjective is accentuated by being placed on a line of its own, and the final exclamation mark in the third line gives the sharpness and danger extra emphasis and pathos. The description continues in the next stanza in a somewhat milder tone as the characterisation of Garborg as ‘Sanningsleitar’ [truth-seeker] is expanded on through the emphasis on his fearlessness in what we understand to be intellectual struggles of great importance. This is followed up in the third stanza where Garborg is referred to as a ‘stridsmann’ [warrior]. This is more or less what we are told about the man who, apparently at least, is the thematic focus of the poem. From here on, the poem is at least as much about ‘I’ as ‘you’. ‘[D]eg, stridsmann, elskar eg’ [You, warrior, I love] Uppdal declares – if we may venture to identify the poem’s ‘I’ with the poet – before comparing his love for Garborg with the fanatical soldier’s love for his commander. ‘[V]erd å bli lik’ [worth emulating], it says in the second line of the stanza, and from here on it is not so much a poem about Garborg as a poem about the relationship, and not least the similarities, between Uppdal and Garborg. Just as Garborg wanted to devote his life to struggle, Uppdal wants to follow his hero into death; just as Garborg has had his struggle, Uppdal has had his. And not least, Garborg has called out to Uppdal, summoning him ‘til eg måtte koma./ Og eg kom.’ [until I had to come./ And I came]. Uppdal is not just a Garborg fan, he is his appointed successor. Thus Uppdal’s poem about Garborg can be read as more than just a homage to a dead colleague; it can also be read as a poem about the kinship between the old and the young, between the receiver and the giver of homage, and as Uppdal’s appointment of himself as Garborg’s successor.

The intense admiration expressed in the poem places the poem within an intellectual framework of what may be called a chieftain cult in the decades around 1900. During this period the influential figures in Norwegian public life display a striking idolisation of the ‘great man’, the ‘representative man’, the ‘heros’, ‘genius’ or indeed ‘chieftain’. 2 This chieftain culture also leaves its mark on the Norwegian literature of the period, and this article will examine both the cult itself and how it is

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2. Historians Bodil Stenseth and Narve Fulsås use the concepts ‘høvdingkultus’ [chieftain cult] (Stenseth 2000, 48) and ‘førarkultus’ [leader cult] (Fulsås 1999, 226) in reference to the phenomenon.
expressed in poetry, specifically in the poems of Kristofer Uppdal, Tore Orjaseter and Olav Nygard, with emphasis on the first and last of these. All of them demonstrate a clear idealisation of ‘the great man’, and a belief that heroes – and the worship of them – can have a progressive influence on society and history.

**THOMAS CARLYLE AND HEROES**

The foremost theoretician of the chieftain cult is undoubtedly the Scottish historian and philosopher Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881). Though relatively unknown today, and almost completely overshadowed by Friedrich Nietzsche, in Norway in the decades mentioned Carlyle was perhaps as important a figure as Nietzsche. It appears that interest in Carlyle began to really take off during the 1880s, not least due to the work of author and translator Vilhelm Troye. Troye opens his biography *Thomas Carlyle, hans liv og hans værk* [Thomas Carlyle, his life and work] from 1889 by explaining how ‘the positive response that my translation of Carlyle’s “On Heroes and Hero-worship” received last year and the interest for Carlyle expressed from all quarters has led me to believe that the time was ripe to make our public better acquainted with this man, who for over a generation was the most remarkable teacher for a great and, for us, kindred nation’ (Troye 1889, preface, unpaginated). The translation he mentions is the book *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* from 1841, published in Norwegian in 1888 with the title *Om herosdyrkelse, eller store mænd, deres væsen og betydning*. In 1890 Troye published his third Carlyle book in as many years, a translation of *The French Revolution, A History* from 1837.

It is unlikely that Troye’s description of the contemporary interest for Carlyle was just self-praise or a marketing ploy. From the late 19th century until well into the 20th, Carlyle had a high standing in Norwegian public life, so high that Fridtjof Nansen in his eulogy to Roald Amundsen, broadcasted on the radio in 1928, not only refers to him without any introductory comments, but also lets Carlyle’s portrayal of courage, strength and fearlessness stand as a yardstick for measuring Amundsen:

Carlyle talks of the old Norwegian maritime kings with their indomitable, ursine determination. He sees them standing on their small boats ‘silent, with closed lips, […] unconscious that they were specially brave; defying the wild ocean with its monsters, and all men and things’. Is this not as if spoken about him, the Roald Amundsen of our own times; he was truly cast in the same mould (Nansen 1942, 692).
More than 60 years have passed when Nansen gives this speech since Aasmund O. Vinje, writing in the newspaper Dølen on April 14, 1866, refers to ‘this Carlyle’ who according to Vinje ‘believes so strongly in great men that he turns them into gods and other folk into nothing’ (Vinje 1971, 214). Vinje himself seems to regard Carlyle’s ideas as part of broader and apparently widespread cultural trend; ‘This “cult of the genius”, as it is called, resembles in many ways a modern version of the Catholic “cult of the saints”. People need something to believe in’ (ibid.). 12 years later the historian Ernst Sars advocates Carlyle’s ideas in an article in the periodical Nyt norsk Tidsskrift in 1878 when he discusses Carlyle’s The Early Kings of Norway (1875) and in that connection presents and endorses Carlyle’s ideas concerning great men and their role in history. ‘You have never had more substantial and interesting reading’, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson writes in 1890 in a letter where he mentions Troye’s editions of Carlyle and advises the recipient to buy both the biography and The French Revolution. He also expresses his own kinship with Carlyle when he writes; ‘and when you read these books, you will see into my own soul better than if I now was to write about myself, which I would find repulsive. For Carlyle’s view on what is important and unimportant in life and learning is mine also.’ (Bjørnson 1953, 16, Bjørnson’s emphasis). In 1913 we find an article in Syn og Segn by Otto Minde called ‘Carlyle i framtidi’ [Carlyle in the future], where ‘the prophet in Chelsea’ (Minde 1913, 499) is referred to as the man with the solution to how mankind is to avoid the collapse of civilisation. And when Christen Collin publishes his study of genius, Det geniale menneske [The person of genius] in 1914, he does so endorsing Carlyle as his authority on the subject. Just two paragraphs into the book, Carlyle is allowed to supply the theoretical premises for the study of genius: ‘Thomas Carlyle, the great Scottish historian and sage, extolled the genius as heros’, Collin writes, ‘seeing in this heros a reflection of the divine Creator, a leader for a group of people in their striving to assist the Eternal in a divine daily labour to form cosmos out of chaos, create order and light, unite contending forces into harmony’ (Collin 1914, 1).

In a combination of leadership ideology and historical theory, the special personality is made the very agent or catalyst of history: ‘World history is the biography of great men’, quotes Sars (1912b, 399). Both the politico-ideological and the historiographical impulse is evident in Troye’s introduction to Om herosdyrkelse: ‘As opposed to the levelling tendency of our democratic age to see leaders as a product of circumstances, the creations of their times, Carlyle argues that the truly great men are the creators of their times’ (Carlyle 1888, preface, unpaginated). From a historiographical perspective, the cult of ‘great men’ implies a rejection of the determinism that resulted from 19th century positivism and histo-
ricity (cf. Fulsås 1999, 89), and a protest against a materialistic approach to the study of history. It can be seen as an attempt to restore the individual, the human being and free will as the decisive factor in history at the expense of historical structures and laws. As Troye writes, Carlyle is ‘the passionate spokesman of idealism in a predominantly material age’ (Carlyle 1888, preface, unpaginated).

Chieftainship is a form of spiritual aristocracy. In politics, in society and in art, respect for the exceptional individual is required. Narve Fulsås writes that Sars saw a possible danger in democratic majority rule curtailing the spiritual freedom of ‘the spiritual aristocracy formed by men of free thought’ (quoted by Fulsås 1999, 225). In Norwegian history, as Sars described it in *Udsigt over den norske historie* [Survey of Norwegian history] (1873–91), the success of the nation rests on an aristocratic foundation. Bjørnson argues in his speech on the occasion of the publishing of the book’s final volume: ‘Our path through history is the path of aristocracy towards democracy. Aristocracy is absorbed into the people and thereby bestows it its nobility. Therefore, chieftainship has characterised our democratic labours so far. Respect for spirit as for law. Letting the great be great and the low be low’ Bjørnson 1913, 221). And although Bjørnson tries to give the aristocratic attitude a democratic purpose, meaning that the spiritual aristocracy in a sense dissolves itself by raising the people to their own level, it is quite clear from what follows that the chieftains have far from lost their historical relevance. The wellbeing of the people still rests on them:

[…] **the power of chieftains is won by endeavour**. He who relaxes, loses it. Our humble circumstances, our deficiency in numbers, obliges us to endeavour; it is required that the chieftains set courageous, long-term goals and that it is an honour to follow. If the chieftains of our little nation lower their endeavours by compromising on their goals, whatever they may gain in the short-term of peace and advantage, it will corrupt our practices (Bjørnson 1913, 223).

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3. According to Fulsås (2009), Sars’s understanding of history gained complete dominance as a result of the dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian union in 1905, and when he celebrated his 70th birthday during the autumn of that same year, he was acclaimed ‘as a unifying national figure’ (ibid.), ‘as a national hero’ with both the prime minister and the foreign minister present (Fulsås 199, 11). He was a personal friend of Vinje and Bjørnson, Welhaven’s nephew and Nansen’s brother-in-law, and through his mother Maren Sars’s social connections – he lived with her until her death in 1898 (https://abl.snl.no/Maren_Sars 23.03.16) – he found himself in the middle of what Stenseth terms ‘the most influential cultural and political circle in Norway’ during the decades before and after 1900 (Stenseth 2000, 32).

4. There is a clear parallel in the first sentence here to Carlyle’s view of the necessary conditions of genius, quoted by Collin: ‘A transcendental capacity of taking trouble’ (Collin 1914, 1).
The chieftain has the role as history’s trailblazer, the one that drives society forward – cf. the ‘courageous long-term goals’ – not least by taking care of society’s spiritual health. In order to ensure that the chieftain can perform his cathartic spiritual and social function, the attempt is made – by Sars, Bjørnson, Collin, and Nansen, by Uppdal, Ørjasæter and Nygard and by many others – to foster a culture where the exceptional individual is respected and allowed to take his well-deserved place as chieftain and leader. It is a question of honour, of establishing a code of honour where honouring and admiring great and exceptional men is itself regarded as honourable. And by expressing one’s admiration for these chieftains, one can borrow some of their honour and glory, and thus also show one’s kinship with them.

So who is this ‘great man’? In his lectures Carlyle differentiates between six different forms an exceptional personality can take: god, prophet, poet, priest, author and king. But as he also states, these forms are really just different manifestations of the same unique capacity: ‘Heros, prophet, poet – we give great men many different names, according to time and place’ (Carlyle 1888, 68). Immediately afterwards he writes: ‘I must admit I cannot imagine a truly great man who could not become every sort of great man’ (ibid., 69). One can suspect, as Vinje hints at with his comparison to the cult of the saints, that there is a certain religious aura associated with the chieftain. ‘Hero worship – burning, boundless devotion and admiration for a worthy human figure that reflects the divine – is this not the seed of Christianity itself? The greatest of all heroes is one that we will not mention here!’ quotes Sars (1912b, 380). As mentioned before, Collin stresses that Carlyle sees in the hero ‘a reflection of the divine Creator’ (Collin 1914, 1).

So the chieftain is an epitomised figure with an element of supernaturality. However, the actual chieftains – at least most of them – are first and foremost worldly figures dealing with worldly tasks. They are individuals who, due to exceptional abilities or capacities – though not in the prosaic sense of talent, flair or ambition – are especially qualified to lead their contemporaries and their society ideologically, politically and intellectually. Sars explains:

[...] while it is the case that in every person there is invested a capacity for heroic sacrifice, an urge to live for higher goals than just pleasure, it is first and foremost the case for the representative men, the geniuses and the heroes of history. And if this urge is an emanation of the eternal and divine in our nature, then these heroes in whom it is most strongly manifested must be regarded as especially ‘god-given’ – ‘god-missioned men’ with a divine right to rule over their fellow human beings and lead them (Sars 1912b, 379).
‘The legitimacy of the chieftain’s power base lay in his intuitive ability to know what was best for the people. The chieftain enjoyed the trust of the people by virtue of his high moral qualities, his marked sense of duty and his selflessness’, writes Stenseth (222, 48). Sars deems that this trust is almost instinctive; ‘The masses have an instinctive urge to submit to exceptional leaders and often follow the born ruler in blind devotion when he has stepped forward’ (1912b, 401). The ruler is born ruler, the people are born with an urge to submit; the chieftain’s legitimacy is innate, if not given by higher powers.

For Sars and many of his contemporaries, there is a type of chieftain that stands out as particularly significant and influential, namely the poet chieftain [‘dikterhøvding’]. Fulsås writes that self-government by the people was for Sars ‘the spontaneous affinity between the chieftain, preferably the poet chieftain, and the people in a sort of poetocratic Bonapartism’ (1999, 227). Wergeland and Bjørnson are foremost the Norwegian poet chieftains, with Hamsun as a stumbling successor after Bjørnson’s death (cf. Rem 2014, 48ff). In reference to Sars’s concept of poetocracy, Stenseth writes that, in the case of Wergeland and Bjørnson, ‘the politician, the educator, the agitator, the writer of articles and letters functioned alongside or alternately with the poet and the artist’ (2010). It is a matter of a poet ‘entering into his age and engaging with its challenges’, writes Leif Longum (1996, 406), ‘a poet with a responsibility to society’, according to Ronny Spaans (2014, 231). It is this role of the poet that Uppdal includes Garborg – and himself – in when he refers to his role model as a fearless ‘truth-seeker’ and ‘warrior’.

POETRY AND STRENGTH

‘The most striking feature of the genius is his abundance of strength’, Collin asserts (1914, 4), citing as distinctive features of the great man’s greatness his reserves of spiritual strength that, when allowed free expression, will work to the betterment of society. ‘The colossal capacity for work – which for the genius often means working alone, in sleep or while the conscious self is busy with other things – demands an unusual ability to call forth an abundance of energy’, Collin continues. ‘The genius is someone who struggles with a huge abundance of energy and in whom this capital is constantly renewing itself and growing over time’ (ibid.). The same parallel between individual spiritual strength and physical energy for social improvement serves as metaphorical foundation when Uppdal characterizes Hans E. Kinck in an article from 1917:
Just as for hundreds and thousands of years, waterfalls have idly rushed and roared, squandering their energies, in the same way Kinck portrays how it is rushes and roars in the soul of the nation. These are the forces in the people that have not been tamed to useful labour and the good of the country, but that squander their energies, destroying themselves like the waterfall. Our waterfalls move us towards the future. And these torrents of energy within the heart of the people, just like the waterfalls, will also be let loose – for anything but self-destruction. But the waterfalls and energies are there, beautiful and proud in their wildness, a bounty for the future. And that is how Kinck appears, as a bounty for the future. A spirit so great it is difficult to take it in at a glance. Turning one’s gaze to his work, it is difficult to know where to start or finish. There is ‘Driftekaren’ [The Drover], the thwarted energy that, finding no outlet, bursts the dam and breaks itself asunder in shafts of colour, with pieces of crystal reflecting Norwegian temperament as it has never before been known in our literature.

The imagery implies that ‘the heart of the people’ [‘folkedjupet’] contains forces that have not been tamed and put to use ‘to useful labour and the good of the country’. This is not so much a matter of muscle power, but rather of spiritual forces. Uppdal is suggesting metaphorically that Kinck’s work contains these forces, that they are mapped, described and embodied in his work. The analogue with the waterfall implies that this literature is the first step in the direction of harnessing these same forces. ‘Reflecting Norwegian temperament’, this literature becomes a source of energy in itself that can be used productively. Thus the poet too becomes a resource than can be used to the betterment of the people and the nation.

The same imagery can be found in the cycle of poems called ‘Aasmund Vinje’. First published in the newspaper Den 17de Mai on April 6, 1918, it is included in the collection Solbløding [Sun bleeding] from the same year with the subheading ‘Til hundradaarsdagen 6-4-1918’ [On the centenary March 6, 1918]. When Uppdal allows it to be republished in Altarelden [Altar fire] (1920), a new poem is added as the third in the cycle. It goes like this:

Menneske-ætta liknar ein sjø som er stemd
ei kraft som er temd.
Og vass-stemen jamnar ut so vatnet skal renne
i like eins straumar dag etter dag.
Men um stemen er trygg kan det likevel hende
han ryk sund
med dun,
og ei storbaare velter
dra vass-stemens djup.
Og den galning i ætta
set utfør kvart stup.
Og naar han har rasa og rusa av
og slaatt seg i sunder paa vegen mot hav,
– daa er ingen ting som før.

– Men ein stem, ei ætt, har løyst seg ut – –

(Uppdal 1920, 95–96)

[The human race is like a lake that is dammed up
a force that is tamed.
And the dam evens out so that the water runs
in identical streams day after day.
But even if the dam is safe it could still happen
that it bursts
with a rumble,
and a huge wave surges
from the depths of the dam.
And the madman of his race
plunges down from every precipice.
And when he has finished raging and rushing
and has smashed himself to pieces on the way to the ocean,
– then nothing is as it was before.

But a dam, a race, has set itself loose – – ]

Here too hydropower functions as a metaphorical resource in the allegory of the poem, but while the power of the people in the Kinck text is a wild force to be tamed and exploited, in the Vinje poem it is a tamed force waiting to be released and liberated. The human race is a dammed up lake, a fettered force. The allegorical depiction of the dam bursting and ‘the madman of his race’ plunging down ‘from every precipice’ is a form of popular, revolutionary liberation. It must be understood as an interruption of social order where ‘a huge wave’ creates chaos and upheaval, before a new and different normality is established when the wave and the madmen have ‘finished raging and rushing/and has smashed himself to pieces on the way to the ocean’. The theme is also emphasised formally in the poem; after five long and calm opening lines, a dramatic break in the poem’s rhythm and tempo occurs in the sixth line. In six short and swift lines the destruction of the tidal wave is described, before the wave and the poem both lose speed
and settle down in the last three lines of the main verse paragraph, accentuated by
the blank line before the poem’s single-line conclusion.

Through the use of water metaphors, and in line with the organic teleological view
of history propounded by Sars and many others, progress is depicted as the result of
a sort of national force of nature. In the same way, hydropower in the 1910s was
becoming inextricably connected both to the Norwegian mountain landscape and to
national progress in terms of technology, industry and economy. Uppdal’s Vinje is
depicted as the figure that harnesses this power for constructive purposes (although
there are clearly also destructive aspects to this constructive enterprise). Vinje sets
off a latent potential in humanity (‘Menneske-ætta’) itself; ‘he is the revelation of an
ideal or a notion which has been worked on in silence and darkness for generations,
and which, without such a revelation, would have lived in vain, without benefitting
the nation or humanity’, as Sars writes when he appoints ‘the representative man’ as
both ‘the goal and the means of progress’ (1912b, 399–400). Vinje the chieftain
ensures that the dam breaks in the fifth line, thus triggering social and historical
change, as emphasised in the imagery, allegory and form of the poem.

THE GREAT AND THE SMALL
‘To let great be great and low be low’, stressed Bjørnson in his speech to Sars
(Bjørnson 1913, 221). ‘And the whole time you have that rare feeling, that hardly
ever grips you otherwise when you are reading, that you can sense the breathing
of a poet so great that everything around – and within you – feels small’, writes
Uppdal in his conclusion to the Kinck essay (1965, 82). Kinck’s writing shows us
a true yardstick for what is great and what is small. This is precisely the focus in
the second of two poems about ‘Fjella’ [The Mountains] in Uppdal’s ‘Haaløyske
sonettar’ [Sonnets from Hålogaland], a poem cycle of 19 sonnets with themes and
motives from Northern Norway:

Vi mæler tindane paa fjellheim-røstet,
men hugsar ikkje smaafjell stundom dyl
dei fjernar storfjell med sin rygge-kryl
– og difor ruver svær, og blir den største.

Men stig ein undan – over kryle-nøstet
ein solskins-boste ris sin straale-syl,
sø høgt han andar blaa-rein æther-kyl
og krylekulen naar kje upp til brøstet.
Og etter som det store stig i ruv
dreg jorda til seg krylen, ét han upp
– til storfjellkroppen i all blaane raar.

Den byrge krylen blir ein køyne-kuv
med rot i taa-a paa den store kropp
– og reint ein pigg for dei som nedfor staar!

(Updalah 1920, 136)

[We measure the peaks on the mountains’ rooftop
but forget that sometimes hills hide
the more distant mountains with their humped back
– and therefore stand out and seem the largest.

But if you step back – over the little hump
A broom of sun raises its shining awl
so high that it breathes blue-clean ether cold
and the hump does not even reach it to the chest.

And as the great [mountain] towers higher
the earth draws in the hump, consuming it
– until the great mountain rules in the blue distance.

The proud hump becomes a wart
A corn on the toe of the great body
– and a very peak for those standing beneath it.

The central motif here is the difference between the great and the small, between ‘krylekulen’ [the little hump] and ‘storfjellkroppen’ [the great mountain body]. The main point is that whether something appears great or small depends on perspective; if you are standing too close, ‘smaafjell’ [hills] may hide ‘dei fjernar storfjell’ [the more distant mountains]. The imagery is anthropomorphic, with the hills described in condescending terms. The phrase ‘den byrge krylen’ [the proud hump] has a sarcastic ring to it, which is accentuated when the little hump is reduced to ‘ein køyne-kuv’ [a wart/corn] on the toe of the mountain. It is also evident that smallness shrinks when greatness shows its true dimensions; while the hill is smaller in the second stanza, although not so much smaller than the mountain than that it nearly reaches it to the chest, in the last stanza it is drastically reduced – after the mountain ‘stig i ruv’ [towers higher].

Those who believe in the greatness of the little hill are also denounced. For one thing, when in the third stanza the earth itself reduces and consumes the little hill,
the notion of regarding it as great is made to seem unnatural. Also, the reference to the wart on the mountain’s toe being ‘reint ein pigg’ [a very peak] for those that are standing beneath it, seems to bear witness to a profound lack of judgement. The enormous contrast between the dimensions of the mountain and the hill makes the mistake appear ridiculous. And when this is the concluding point of the sonnet’s tercet, whose purpose, according to Hallvard Lie, is to make the insight of the quatrains ‘the subject of a more thorough consideration resulting in a “synthesis”, a more or less concise coda’, (Lie 1967, 655), it seems clear that the poem is not simply making the in itself obvious point that perspective can lead to a misjudgement of the greatness of mountains (i.e. poets). The poem is also – and perhaps primarily – saying that one can distinguish between great and small individuals on the basis of their ability to distinguish the great from the small.

It is therefore fitting that Uppdal follows up this poem with a portrayal of one of the greatest – and most controversial – contemporary writers, Knut Hamsun:

Han ris upp fjellstor under vindlys’-plogen
i havblaa natt som galdre-diger grunar,
med’ glasgrøn snø-bre’ over svaet dunar
og mél seg sund til mjell mot snølys’-logen.

Og snø skin jarnnatt-blaa mot sjørnebogen,
der braget spinn mangleta fosfor-spunar
med silke-skraav som gir og elskhug runar,
og rullar galdr og faun-spel gjennom skogen.

Ei jord-aand, ør av storaars nattsvevn, vaknar,
d’er gjekk og faun-spel, varvarm aandraatt ryk,
det fløyter, gigjar, millom hornlur-knegg.

Og risen skjék’ sitt mjell-sno-haar og skjegg,
det breier seg lik uvers-él som flaknar,
og bringa skin der lynet glør i stryk.

(Updald 1920, 137)

[He towers like a mountain under the plough of the aurora
in ocean-blue night that ponders, full of sorcery,
while the glass-green glacier thunders over the bare rock
and is ground to dry snow under the flame of the snow light.]
And snow shines blue in the iron night under the starry arch
where the gleam spins many-coloured phosphor threads
with silk-rustling that conjures desire and love,
and rolls sorcery and faun-play through the wood.

An earth-spirit awakens, dizzy after centuries of night-sleep,
there is japery and faun-play and steam from spring-warm breath,
there is fluting and fiddling, interspersed with the whinnying of horns.

And the giant shakes his snow-powdered hair and beard,
it showers like a storm flurry in flakes
and his chest shines where the lightning gleams.]

The mountain metaphors link the poem directly to the previous one, and this structural and metaphorical connection supports the assumption that the two poems ‘Fjella’ I and II are to be read allegorically as poems about poets. Moreover, the connection is strengthened by the use in the first stanza of the adjective ‘fjellstor’, which is an inversion of the noun ‘storfjell’ in the third verse of ‘Fjella’ II. The inversion also expresses in concentrated form the tropological reversal from one poem to the other; while the ‘Fjella’ poems portray mountains in terms of anthropomorphic metaphors, the poem ‘Knut Hamsun’ portrays a person – a poet – in mountain imagery.

As with the other five portraits of poets in ‘Haaløyske sonettar’, there is little at first glance that points in the direction of the poet that is being portrayed. Instead, the portraits are very abstract, almost non-figurative, and it seems as if whatever features of the portrayed that are present can only be seen metaphorically or allegorically, as possible similarities between the poem’s natural imagery and the poet thematically focused on in the title of the poem. In this case, one can imagine Hamsun towering like an enormous, exposed mountain in the literary and intellectual landscape of Norway. As such, the poem can obviously be read as an expression of Uppdal’s admiration for Hamsun (which he has clearly expressed elsewhere, cf. e.g. Uppdal 1965, 57–63).

However, Hamsun is also visible in a different way in the poem. As in the other Hålogaland portraits of poets, the poet appears by means of intertextuality. This is revealed through an examination of the poems seasonal metaphors. Vigdis Ystad sees Hamsun portrayed ‘as an enormous mountain, giddy and full of the vitality of spring and summer’ (1978, 143), an impression she probably has from the imagery of the second half of the second quatrains and the first tercet. It seems to me, however, that Hamsun is pretty consistently portrayed through winter imagery in the poem. In the first stanza this is clearly the case; he stands up under the
plough of the aurora in a ‘galdre-diger’ [full of sorcery] night, perhaps referring to the polar night. The winter metaphors continue in the images of snow and stars in the first two lines of the second stanza. But here there is a change of season, at least apparently. However, the spring motif that emerges in the stanza’s last two lines and is continued in the next stanza is in a sense on a different level to the winter imagery. A close scrutiny of the second stanza reveals that spring is magically conjured up – cf. the verb ‘runar’ [conjures] – by means of the poem’s ‘silke-skraav’ [silk-rustling]. What is this silk-rustling? It is the sound of the aurora. The metaphor plays on the notion that the Northern Lights could be heard, a notion that was prevalent until well into the 20th century. We find, for example, an article in Aftenposten June 8 1913 (nr. 283, 4) entitled ‘Nordlyset. Følges det af nogen lyd?’ [The Northern Lights. Do they make a sound?] in which the notion is discussed and rejected. It refers to a ‘very widespread notion among the population of the northern regions’ that there is such a sound, ‘called by most a rustling sound’. And ‘braget’ [the gleam] in the second line of the stanza should be understood as the same Northern Lights, spinning their ‘mangleta fosfor-spunar’ [many-coloured phosphor threads] in the starry night sky. This seems an appropriate metaphoric description of the aurora, which can appear in varying and shifting colours structured in staves or stripes resembling threads.

In much of his poetry from this period, Uppdal uses starlight, and especially the aurora, as an image of spiritual power (cf. Claudi 2016, esp. 277–282). If we let this apply to the poem ‘Knut Hamsun’ too, our reading of the second stanza must be that the Hamsun spirit conjures up a spring in its poetry, rather than that spring comes to the Hamsun-mountain. The third stanza contains an allusion to Hamsun’s writing, namely the novel Pan. In this work Hamsun awakens a ‘jord-aand’ [earth spirit], the first part of the word having connotations, in a vitalistic context, of eroticism and procreation. Here there is spring, warmth and ‘faun-spel’ [faun-play] (Faunus being the Roman equivalent of the Greek Pan, god of passion and fertility, in other words for ‘gir og elskhug’). Hamsun is a figure drawn metaphorically in terms of a mountain in winter, i.e. as a tremendous, powerful, supreme and perhaps terrifying figure, but one who creates literature that contains the forces of spring and passion.

So the poem ‘Knut Hamsun’ contains an important allusion to Hamsun’s Pan, and when Uppdal allows Hamsun’s writing to, as it were, fertilise or infiltrate his own in this fashion, he is placing himself in a form of intertextual debt to his predecessor that is reminiscent of what I pointed out earlier in connection with the poem written to Garborg. He is carrying on the legacy of Petter Dass, John Klæbo, Jonas Lie, Elias Blix, Bernt Lie and Knut Hamsun, all of whom are given a literary
portrait in ‘Haaleyske sonettar’, and all of whom can be similarly glimpsed through allusions. Thus Uppdal shows not only his admiration for the older poets, but that he also has followed in their footsteps and included elements of their writing in his own. In this way he demonstrates his literary kinship with them and places himself in a succession of chieftain poets from Northern Norway.

Here, as in the poems about ‘Fjella’, we see the reflexive aspect of the chieftain cult. By showing one’s admiration for others, one shows one’s own greatness. ‘A person’s worth can be measured by his ability to admire’, Sars writes, endorsing Carlyle (Sars 1912a: 471). The ability to admire is seen as a highly attractive personal characteristic, evidence of greatness and fearlessness, even of masculinity, as suggested when Francis Bull writes that Gerhard Gran’s Ibsen biography from 1918 ‘bæres oppe av en mandig beundring og forståelse’ [is supported by a manly admiration and understanding] (Bull and Jansen 1929, 557, my italics). It is also clearly an expression of a positive appraisal when Hans Eitrem in his preface to Troye’s posthumously published Wergeland biography writes that the biographer found in Carlyle ‘the clearly developed and expressed need to devote himself to spirits greater than himself, a need Troye had to an exceptional degree. He had the distinguishing characteristic of the true hero-worshipper – a complete lack of self-idolisation and the need and ability to devote himself to admiration of greatness’ (Troye and Eitrem 1908, viii). We sense here what Marianne Egeland points out in her analysis of the Wergeland cult around the turn of the last century: ‘By understanding him better than his contemporaries did, by defending him against petty, reactionary opponents and conveying his visionary ideas, the biographer and his subject become allies’ (Egeland 2000, 183). By emphasising the chieftain, one emphasises oneself. Fulsås refers to and gives his support to Trygve Ræder’s assertion that ‘Sars developed his own self-esteem through his worship of Bjørnson’ (1999, 226).

**ADMIRATION AND PROGRESS**

When Sars emphasises ‘the importance of great men in history and the veneration that is due to them and their memory’ as ‘the core point in [Carlyle’s] historical philosophy’ (1912b, 380) he is also emphasising how important it has been, both in and for history, to remember and admire these chieftains. Admiration and veneration are progressive forces in history because they have an ennobling effect on the individual. Sars quotes:

> No nobler feeling than this of admiration for one higher than himself dwells in the breast of man. It is to this hour, and at all hours, the vivifying influence in
man’s life. Religion I find stand upon it; not Paganism only, but far higher and truer religions,—all religion hitherto known. (Sars 1912b, 380).

‘Ah, does not every true man feel that he is himself made higher by doing reverence to what is really above him?’ Carlyle writes himself (1888, 14). The purpose of both hero worship and religion is to ennoble the individual, in other words to ‘nourish the inner flame that is called conscience’ and ‘to remind us of what we already know, that there is an endless distance between a good man and a bad man, to exhort us to love the one endlessly and hate the other endlessly and to strive endlessly to be like the one and not the other’ (Sars 1912b, 377). Hero worship and religion merge. Through veneration the flame of conscience is lit; the admirer is ennobled and learns to distinguish good from bad, great from small. By looking up to one more gifted than oneself, one acquires in a sense the characteristics one admires. Thus the hero functions as a role model and a pioneer, and the admiration ensures that the admirers follow the hero along the path he has marked out for his community.

This same notion is central in Tore Ørjasæter’s poetic eulogy to Lars Eskeland, ‘Kvæde til menner og til mannen’ [Ode to men and the man] (1915). As the title suggests, the poem is directed to men in general, but also to ‘the man’, which is probably the chieftain in the shape of Eskeland. This is the first stanza:

Kvæde til menner, er aa la mann’
kjenne sitt andsvar til grunnen;
kveikje hans hug i ein viljebrand,
leggje ‘om ord i munnen,
prise den hovding som heil og sann
fører striden.

(Ørjasæter 1915, 37)

[Odes to men are about letting the man
know his responsibility completely,
kindling his mind to a fire of the will
putting words in his mouth,
praising the chieftain who, wholly and truely,
leads the fight.]

The poem and the stanza feature several of the same motifs as we saw in Uppdal’s ode to Garborg: the chieftain’s tiresless mind, his spiritual combativeness and his honesty. But unlike Uppdal’s poem, Ørjasæter’s contains an explicitly didactic element. Through his ode to the exceptional man, the poet can arouse a sense of responsibility and determination in ‘the man’ in general. Not only that – the man’s
mind and sense of responsibility is aroused by the poet ‘putting words in his mouth’, which in this context means teaching him to praise the chieftains, as the last two lines suggest. The poem is not just didactic, it is exemplary, in line with the notion of the chieftain as role model. By demonstrating his admiration for those who deserve admiration, the poet can have an ennobling effect on others, as the dual address of the poem’s title emphasises. The project of the poem is to praise a chieftain – Eskeland – so that others can see, learn from and participate in his responsibility and determination. The same meta-poetic point is made to apply to the whole collection by virtue of its title *Manns kvæde* [Man’s ode] (1915). These are odes about the man, to the man and from the man.

The theme of the Man with a capital M can also be found in the poems of Olav Nygård, and here too we sense that the man’s endeavours serve a socially and historically progressive function. ‘Det var helgstilt i himlom den dagen han sprang / som eit stupande stjernespur fram / og det æveleg avløps av allskaparfang / og tok buland på jordavangs-tram’ [It was quiet in heaven the day he leapt / like a shooting star down/ out of the eternally fertile lap of the creator / and landed on the doorstep on a grassy knoll]; these are the first four lines of the poem ‘Mann’ [Man] from his best known collection *Ved vebande* [By the enclosure5] (1923). The man in question is sent by the creator, a sort of Messiah figure, sent to a yearning earth. The poem continues:

\[
\text{Det var songdiser, bylgjunn med sylvrende skaut;}
\text{han er fødd, og hans namm det er mann!}
\text{Det var heimkomegaava, den gullsaum som flaut}
\text{ut or sol-aaren, helsing til han.}
\text{Her var lengta i langbil – kven talde dei aar}
\text{ifraa fornalders flogskoddegry,
\text{ifraa sola vart barnkjømd og jorda fekk vaar
og laag linda i dvaletung sky?}
\]

*(Nygård 1923, 39)*

[There were goddesses of song, waves of silver-threaded shawls;
he is born, and his name is man!
That was his homecoming gift, the golden seam that flowed
from the sun’s artery, a greeting to him.
He was long-awaited – who counted the years
from the swirling mist of ancient times,
from when the sun became fertile and the earth had spring
and lay swaddled in slumbering cloud?]

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5. Translator’s note: ‘Vebande’ (from Old Norse vēþōnd) refers to ribbons that were used to fence off a sacred area.
The man is portrayed in clearly vitalistic metaphors as a gift from the heaven and the sun to earth, like the outbreak of summer and sunshine on a cloud-shrouded earth. The imagery is continued in the next stanza, where the earth is portrayed as a store of nourishment and a wet nurse for the man as it ‘fløder med sevje og merg’ [flows with sap and marrow] and ‘nøyer kvar bot mellom berg/til aa auka hans avle og kraft’ [makes use of every patch between rock/to increase his vitality and strength]. In the second half of the stanza, man’s spirit of endeavour is also aroused, strikingly focused on the same thing – ensuring his own growth and strength:

Og den mergtyrste vaaen er sjølvminnt og bryt seg med berrhendes braaofse inn til si sogmor, riv klæde fraa brjost; og det tryt fyr in his strong sucking cheeks.]

By means of the metaphorical combination of a suckling child and a ‘våe’ [daredevil], the man is portrayed as a fierce, self-assertive figure, but at the same time a figure that is lovingly nourished and prepared for just such a role. In the stanza that follows we learn why the earth puts all its energy into nourishing this man. ‘Det ligg songstein i fara hans’ [There are song stones in his tracks] the fourth stanza starts, introducing a meta-poetic perspective to the poem; ‘grormolda nyt / kvart eit slag som hans fotsole gav; / ut der storbylgjeskavlen um marbakken ryt / dreg han perlur og dyrder or kav’ [the soil enjoys / every blow his soles gave; / out where the great wave breaks around the underwater shelf / he finds pearls and splendours in the depths’]: The man himself contributes to growth, drawing riches from the chaos of the deep, which, in the light of the wave motif in the second stanza, must be understood as a sort of cosmic-spiritual primeval ocean.

The meta-poetic theme is continued in the fifth stanza. The first half establishes a connection between the word or the song and the deed, accentuated by the rhyming pair ‘raad’ [means] and ‘daad’ [deed]. In the second half his gaze too has acquired a sort of performative power, a power that once again stems from creation itself:

Han hev ljodstreng i strupe, den rike manns raad utav ord i si tung; han stend som ein steinmann og tunglesser tanken med daad
som kann skuve ein jordklot i vend.
Kor det ropar or augo naar tunga ligg bleik
under byrda, og lippa fær kvil.
Men naar styrken er mod, og han kjenner seg veik
faar han flodmagt av allskaparsmil.

(IBEID.)

[He has the string of song in his throat, the rich man’s store
of words in his tongue; he stands
like a stone man and burdens thought with deeds
that can change the direction of a globe.
How his gaze shouts when his tongue lies pale
under the burden, and the lip rests.
But when his strength is dulled and he feels weak
he receives a flood of power from the creator’s smile.]

A prophetic figure is portrayed here, ‘ein steinmann’ [a stone man] who endows
thought with a heavy but potent burden through his song and his art. He burdens
his audience with a deed that has the potential to ‘skuve ein jordklot i vend’
[change the direction of a globe], to change the world. In lines five and six we
learn that it is not just through his art, but also by virtue of his personality, his gaze,
that he exercises his ‘power over the tides’. It is this prophetic role that makes the
man glow in the last stanza, accentuated by the introductory conjunction ‘Og’
[And]:

Og daa gløder hans kraftmerg, og fangarmar triv
liksom flogkilar endelangs inn
genom grjotheimen, gravheimen; hungeren driv
han paa landvinnarferd til han finn
sine bivrande bruer til grøderikt land
ut i øva, hans tropelandsdraum;
han vil sjølv kveikje soler med øveleg brand
og sjaa heile Guds allmagt i flaum.

(IBEID., 41)

[And then his (bone) marrow glows, and tentacles grasp
like wedges all the way in
through the world of rock and graves; hunger drives
him on a journey of conquest until he finds
his trembling bridges to fertile land
in eternity, his dream of the tropics;
he wants to kindle suns himself with eternal fire
and see all God’s omnipotence in flood.]
The frequent caesuras and the consistent enjambement in the first six lines of the stanza create a staccato and ecstatic effect as the glowing man extends his tentacles into other worlds and domains. In this way he reaches ‘til grøderikt land’ [to fertile land], the fertility being of the spiritual sort. The last two lines of the stanza express a dream of participating in divine creation. Here the stanza and the poem come to rest, also formally, in two complete sentences (although the second is in apposition to the subject and verb of the first). The man has reached his destination, which is to (attempt to) work in the name of creation itself. Both the paradisiacal telos and his semi-divine ambitions, in addition to the notion of extracting riches from the chaos of the deep, harmonise well with Collin’s previously quoted characterisation of the genius as being ‘the divinely-inspired creator’ who assists ‘the Eternal in a divine daily labour to form cosmos out of chaos, create order and light, unite contending forces into harmony’ (Collin 1914, 1).

The poem’s meta-poetical aspect is underlined by the image of ‘bivrande bruer’ [trembling bridges] in the fifth line, a motif that refers back to the first stanza of ‘Bru’ [bridge], the first poem of Flodmaal (1913), Nygard’s first collection of poetry; «Eg bygger i tru / ei skjelvande sjulita verbogebru / fraa trongrømde tune i dalskuggen graa / til himelen høge og heilage blaa.» [I build in faith / a trembling seven-coloured rainbow bridge / from a cramped yard in the grey shadow of the valley / to heaven high and sacred blue]. According to Eirik Vassenden this poem deals not least with ‘giving form to inspiration’ (Vassenden 2002, 51), and by drawing parallels to the three Christian virtues of faith, hope and love, he connects it to a passage in St.Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians which states that ‘he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort’. Vassenden also quotes Johs. Dale’s assertion (1957, 86) that the poem can be read as ‘a plan, a list of contents, not only for “Flodmaal”, but for all of Nygard’s poetry’ (Vassenden 2002, 53). The allusion to his own poetry implies that it is through artistic creation that the man can see his own work – and himself – as part of ‘Guds allmagt’ [God’s omnipotence]. The implication is thus that the thematic focus of the poem is not just a man sent by God, but a poet chieftain. This is further underlined by the fact that the poem shares the same structure and metre as two other poems in Ved vebande, ‘Til gampen min’ [To my nag] and ‘Wergeland’ – and only these two. Both poems are clearly meta-poetic, and perhaps these three poems can be seen as representing a development within the collection in the direction of a universalisation of the poet and his work. While the first seems to be connected to the poet’s own role as a poet, (cf. Vassenden 2002, 184), the second deals with Norway’s foremost poetic chieftain, perhaps alongside Bjørnson. In the last of the three poems the perspective is broadened; ‘Mann’ casts the poet in the role of a divinely
inspired, but earthly nourished artistic benefactor. Thus Nygard, both in ‘Mann’ and throughout Ved vebande develops a heroic role for himself and his peers.

Nygard’s depiction of the great man’s spiritual ‘landvinnarferd’ [journey of conquest] also illustrates what appears to be a common denominator in the portrayal of past and contemporary chieftains in the early 20th century; the reason why Wergeland and Bjørnson, Nansen and Amundsen are the nation’s heroes is because they are seen as pioneers or conquerors on behalf of humanity. In 1911 Sigurd Ibsen writes:

The intellectual liberty of science, which breaks established doctrines, like artistic autonomy, which will only obey the laws of its own genius, is closely related to the revolutionary self-assertion of born leaders who are not satisfied with the circumstances they find, but who forge their own special fate, not just adapting to social and political conditions, but forcing them to fit their own aims and needs (Ibsen 1911, 210).

So artistic and scientific obstinacy is compared to political rebellion, and for Ibsen, as for Carlyle, greatness appears in different forms; the kinship between the artist, the scientist and the leader is that they are all chieftains, and the comparison implies that scientific and artistic freedom and self-assertion also has a social benefit. It is by choosing their own paths, by adopting their own rules that ‘great men’ show their greatness, and in doing so they ‘show us an extension of human possibilities taken to the uttermost’ and ‘reveal how far man can move the boundaries of what is achievable, and to what heights he can lift his existence’ (ibid., 213). Thus it is legitimate, perhaps even imperative, that the chieftain’s focus is on his own spiritual development and forceful appropriation of spiritual nourishment, as illustrated by the suckling chieftain child in ‘Mann’. It is not a question of vanity or greed, but of realising his abilities and capacities, of driving himself to the limit, and thus fulfilling not only his own potential, but also humanity’s, cf. Ibsen. ‘What we need most of all is free spirits, men who have achieved the ultimate, which according to Goethe is to fulfil oneself’, argues Gerhard Gran in 1916 (p. 259). And as Eric Bentley comments in his study of what he calls ‘heroic vitalism’, ‘He who believes in the Elect seldom believes that he is not elected’ (1957, 20).

CONCLUSION

‘He is an uncompromising figure who primarily listens to his own inner voice, a freedom fighter who loves to bare his breast in an aesthetically effective gesture...
‘HIS NAME IS MAN!’

[...]’ writes Asbjørn Aarseth about the romantic hero that he sees as an important figure in 19th century Nordic literature (Aarseth 1985, 261). This hero has a central position in what he identifies as a romantic thematic complex consisting of ‘certain postures, manners, ways of thinking and points of orientation that appear to have been particularly favoured and accentuated by contemporaries’ (Aarseth 1985, 261). Aarseth doesn’t mention Carlyle, but his heroic figure is closely related to the Carlyle-inspired chieftain who serves as a fundamental topos in the Norwegian chieftain cult and the poems referred to here. The connection becomes even clearer when Aarseth explains his concept ‘liberalromantikk’ [Liberal Romanticism]. In his historiographically challenging chapter in Norsk litteratur i tusen år [Norwegian literature during a thousand years] he writes: ‘Liberal Romanticism is heroic individualism, focused on the development of the self, idealistically as in Kierkegaard, and primarily in pursuit of liberty’ (Aarseth 1996, 324). Neither is Aarseth’s romantic continuum limited to the 19th century – it stretches ‘a fair way into the each of the adjoining centuries’ (Aarseth 1985, 261).

The disappearance of the notions and ideals of the chieftain cult from literature and intellectual life during the course of the 20th century probably has explanations. ‘The life of his spirit might plausibly be dated 1795–1945’ writes Bentley about Carlyle (1957, 4) and makes the obvious point that the experiences of the Second World War lead to the worship of strong leaders falling into disgrace. It is also possible that the extreme masculinity of the chieftain cult meant that it increasingly came into conflict with the politically progressive forces that were gradually gaining ground in Northern Europe, and that it therefore appeared much less acceptable. The strong focus on individual agents probably helped alienate historians who were gradually shifting their emphasis to structural, economic and institutional factors. As far as literary history is concerned, Uppdal’s, Ørjasæter’s and Nygard’s chieftain cult can be seen, within the framework of Aarseth’s model of Romanticism, as the product of an overripe (liberal) Romanticism that was beginning to lose literary status. Thus there is, in spite of Uppdal’s and Nygard’s sometimes pioneering style and imagery, a retrospective thematic and ideological element in what was intended to be poetry dedicated to historical progress and its agents.

‘Could we see them well, we should get some glimpses into the very marrow of the world’s history’, writes Carlyle about the heroes (1888, 2). In the present context we must be satisfied with a lesser ambition. By attempting to understand the chieftain cult and its exponents, we can catch a glimpse of an aspect of recent Norwegian literary and cultural history that has been underexposed. As I have tried to show, these ideas have been of crucial significance for some of the central figures
in Norwegian public and intellectual life, as evidenced by Harald Beyer’s comment on Nietzsche’s impact in Scandinavia reflected in Norwegian periodicals during the 1890s: It is ‘easy to overestimate the role he played in the intellectual life of the time. It is therefore worth mentioning that if we did a similar selection regarding Darwin or Carlyle, we would see that Darwin is mentioned at least as often and Carlyle (and Kierkegaard) not much less’ (Beyer 1958, 186). The comment is most likely as valid today as when Beyer wrote it. But while every humanist is familiar with the essentials of Nietzsche’s philosophy, Carlyle and the hero cult that he inspired was rapidly overshadowed by history – or perhaps by Nietzsche. And even if the notions themselves, in terms of ideology and historical theory, deserve to remain there, the philosophy, and the honour code that originated from it, deserves attention as a significant if strange phenomenon in recent Norwegian history.

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