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# The ‘accurate’ deeds of our fathers

## The ‘authentic’ narrative of early Norway

Karl C. Alvestad

*The archaeological traces leave little doubt about the fact that several generations of Iron Age chieftains of the same calibre as Raudr have lived in Skjerstad.<sup>1</sup>*

This quote by Heim Bjartman Bjerck, taken from the programme of the 2010 performance of the site-specific play *Ragnhilds Drøm* (*Ragnhild’s Dream*), directed by Ronald Rørvik and written by Anne Helgesen and Lyder Verne,<sup>2</sup> refers to the cultural landscape of the Skjerstad fjord area, a landscape consisting of a significant selection of burial mounds from the Viking Age. In his statement, Bjerck claims that this landscape gives evidence of the existence of a series of strong chieftains in the region during the Viking Age. The inclusion of Bjerck’s quote in the programme is meant to legitimize and authenticate the narrative of *Ragnhilds Drøm* and to anchor it in the physical landscape surrounding the production. However, this use of the landscape raises a number of questions: first, what function does the landscape and landscape references, like those used by Helgesen and Verne, play in the production and experience of Norwegian medievalism? Second, what does this tell us about Norwegian medievalism? And third, what, if anything, does this have to do with the ideas of accuracy and authenticity within medievalism in Norway after 1945? These questions are interlinked and require a comparative analysis of the changing attitudes to accuracy and authenticity within mainstream medievalism in Norway between 1945 and 2015. I have elsewhere explored the role of Norwegian medievalism in the cultural construction of Norway in the period 1770–1940,<sup>3</sup> but in this chapter, I wish to explore how these mythologies were extended in the post-1945 Norwegian medievalist corpus of historical plays and books, and how they construct and validate their ideas and notions of accuracy and authenticity.<sup>4</sup>

Exploring these questions will help us better understand the strategies used to validate and construct authentic and ‘accurate’ medieval experiences in non-Anglophone contexts and will give a comparison for contemporary interaction with the medieval and medievalism in places such as the British Isles, France, the United States and Australia, as well as in the virtual world. In their 2013 study of Medievalism, Tison Pugh and Angela Weisl noted that authentic representation of the medieval is

‘what successive periods have chosen to make of this period’ and that the experience of this authenticity is the sharing in ‘the sense of fantasy’ that is drawn from this post-medieval construct of the medieval.<sup>5</sup> In the Norwegian context, an authentic experience of the Viking Age, which serves as the context for *Ragnhilds Drøm*, would be dependent on the transmission of historical scholarship, popular understanding and cultural mythologizing of the period and its imagery through which the audience can directly draw on their own pre-existing understanding of what makes a ‘Viking’ and what constitutes the Viking Age. Similar to Pugh and Weisl’s observation of experiencing ‘medieval’ music,<sup>6</sup> the audience needs to be directly exposed to features that to them are perceived as distinctly ‘Viking’ or medieval to not feel cheated in their experiences. This experience does not have to be an accurate depiction of the medieval, as the concerns and thoughts of people of the medieval period might not be familiar or recognizable to a popular audience, but instead the experience needs to express at least a veneer of ‘authenticity’; that is, it must make reference to commonly held understandings of the period displayed, to veil modern concerns and attitudes as authentic for the audience. This veneer, or ‘fantasy’, as Pugh and Weisl call it, is needed to bridge the gap between the present and the past, and in their words sends the audience on a ‘direct experience, of an emotional journey [. . .] to take [the audience] out of the contemporary world, into [. . .] a nostalgic past.’<sup>7</sup> In other words, the foundations of authenticity of the medieval and Viking Age in Norwegian post-1945 medievalism are those elements that validate and project individuals that are engaging with the medievalism from their contemporary time into the past; these aspects do not need to be accurate or based in actual historical evidence. Instead they need to be based on aspects that are commonly held as representative of the period with which the medievalism interacts. The role of the bridge between present and past can be fulfilled most easily by visual clues such as buildings like a castle, medieval church, ruins, the costumes used by the actors, sounds or even social interaction or gender norms.

Unfortunately, a combination of historical developments, demography, geography and climate contributes to the reality that the Norwegian landscape today lacks distinctly medieval structures or remains that can function as mnemonic devices and backdrops for medievalism. The few surviving medieval churches, including the Stave Churches,<sup>8</sup> are among the rare physical remains of the middle ages in Norway. Instead, sites of memory linked to events in the sagas of Snorri Sturluson, like the fields of Stiklestad or the fjords and landscape itself, take on this authenticating function through the actions of men. This use of memory sites and the landscape is also advocated by Birger Sivertsen, through the website *spelhåndboka.no*, as part of a guide to producing historical plays, but Sivertsen also stresses that a play will appear more trustworthy and authentic if it draws on local historical sources or oral traditions.<sup>9</sup> Such local historical plays are usually site-specific, preformed in open-air theatres and are rarely, if ever preformed, outside the locality with which their narrative is concerned. This means that the landscape surrounding the theatre grounds the narrative spatially as is the case with *Ragnhilds Drøm*.

A common source to use as a foundation for the plays is Snorri’s *Heimskringla*, as it chronicles the story of the Norwegian kingdom and its people, and it forms the foundations for early Norwegian history. Snorri’s importance for Norwegian history

and nationalism has been discussed elsewhere, but for the clarity of this chapter it is worth noting that from the nineteenth century onwards, stories from *Heimskringla* formed a crucial part of the Norwegian history textbooks making children and adults alike aware of the ethno-genesis of the Norwegian nation as told by Snorri.<sup>10</sup> Beyond this, *Heimskringla* actively uses the landscape and place names to validate its own narratives and stories, and these references are in modern times used as the geographical foundations for productions like *Ragnhilds Drøm*, while the society and gender balance described in the saga form the foundation of a popular historical understanding of the gender relations of the Viking Age. These gender relations are integrally connected with the idea of the division of labour in Viking Age society, with women being responsible for cooking, childcare and textile production – all indoor pursuits – whereas men were responsible for farming, hunting, fishing and trade. These stereotypes are reproduced in textbooks and provide a 'universal' historical 'truth' alongside landscape references that artists and authors can use to construct a medieval feeling for those interacting with their productions. These are the 'universal' myths of the gender roles of the pre-industrial past, with women working indoors and men outside, and the timelessness of the Norwegian landscape. It has elsewhere been argued that Snorri was used by modern historians during the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century to define the Norwegian nation and to transmit the idea of Norway as a coherent natural unit.<sup>11</sup> As an extension of this mythology of the Norwegian 'homeland', the local and regional cultural landscape became the local representation of the wider nation and a touchstone for the self in the national narrative of the Norwegians. Because of this, the landscape of Norway is almost a nationwide site of memory connecting the nation with the former inhabitants of the land.

This national reading of the landscape and nation is, and has been, focused on the Norse or Norwegian historical continuity, which has excluded indigenous traditions such as that of the Sami and Finnish populations of modern Norway. The historical erasure of the Sami was until the late 1980s part of an official cultural policy of the Norwegian state which sought the cultural assimilation of the Sami.<sup>12</sup> Similar to the Norwegian narratives of historical continuity in a historical homeland of fjords and farms, the Sami preserved and maintained an identity closely linked to the landscape and the lifestyle it supported. This is partly due to the romanticization of the Sami, which, according to Kjell Olsen, is defined by their relationship with the region and landscape of Finnmark and its wilderness.<sup>13</sup> This connection is reflected in the few films produced about events in Sami history, such as *The Pathfinder* (1987)<sup>14</sup> and *The Kautokeino Rebellion* (2008),<sup>15</sup> where the landscape and its distinctive features play an integral role. Such landscape-based identities are not unique to Norway, but have been recognized also by Miroslav Hroch, Ruby Koshar, Serhii Plokhly and Adrian Hastings, who acknowledge that similar trends can be found elsewhere in Europe.<sup>16</sup> In the Norwegian case, it can be argued that the whole Norwegian landscape is steeped in memories and narratives, like a promised land, causing the landscape of 'land of the Norwegians',<sup>17</sup> according to Inger Birkeland, to become part of the cultural heritage of the nation and causing the landscape and culture to influence each other.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, within this landscape there are certain sites and places, like Stiklestad, where the historical narrative of the past condenses and thus they become symbolically

more important than others; such places can best be understood as a site of memory in the manner described and theorized by Pierre Nora.<sup>19</sup> As such, both the landscape overall and the specific sites within it are anchors that can validate and authenticate medievalism by creating a link between the now and then.

The foundation for the continued appreciation of the Norwegian landscape is the curriculum in Norwegian schools, which directly informs contemporary understanding of the landscape.<sup>20</sup> The curriculum has also influenced how the modern audience interact and engage with pre-industrial gender roles. Nanna Løkka noted in 2014 that modern research into gender and gender roles in the Viking Age has not influenced the popular understanding of the period, but that instead the persistent image in popular culture depicts gender relations in accordance to who women are to their male relatives.<sup>21</sup> As such, it is reasonable to claim that Norwegian medievalism, as popular culture, perpetuates a simplified depiction of Viking Age gender and thus caters to the pre-existing expectations of its audience rather than taking on board new research. Løkka's main argument is that women's societal role in the Viking Age is undervalued in popular representations and that there are modern cultural and societal barriers against depicting female agency outside the household and farm.<sup>22</sup> This assumption and representation also flavour what is perceived as natural for men and the masculine – that men are responsible for social, cultural and political interests of the family in the wider socio-political environment in which they live. Løkka's assessment of the gender bias in popular culture, and the reliance on Snorri's work in Norwegian medievalism, help focus this study of the use of landscape and gender in medievalism. On the basis of Løkka's critique and the use of Snorri's narratives, this chapter will focus on popular medievalism in the forms of historical plays, novels and films that draws on or is set in the period 800–1200 and was produced in post-Second World War Norway. For the sake of brevity, this chapter will focus its analysis on a small corpus of representative examples that reflect the wider trends of the period, but which also have significant circulation and cultural impact compared to other examples of post-war medievalism. The sample has been selected on the basis of experiential interaction with text and the past and will consist of the site-specific plays *Spelet om Heilag Olav* (*The Drama of Saint Olaf*) and *Ragnhilds Drøm*, and Vera Henriksen's trilogies *The Sigrid Trilogy* and *The Ship Without a Dragon*. These texts and plays represent a wider context of medievalism in Norway, but to best illustrate the relationships of the sample with the rest of post-war Norwegian medievalism a chronological overview of medievalist trends has been included.

Following the Second World War, Norwegian culture and society underwent a process of cleansing and rehabilitation from the influence of the occupation years and their cultural production. This rehabilitation was a reaction against the Norwegian fascist party *Nasjonal Samling's* use of medieval sites like Stiklestad and Borre for their political rallies and monuments.<sup>23</sup> The fascist use of these two sites was part of a wider trend of using Viking and medieval history to further the party's racial and social ideals. The destruction of *Nasjonal Samling's* monument at Stiklestad in 1945 and the demonstrations against Quisling's visit to the Norwegian coronation church Nidarosdomen in 1942 illustrate how *Nasjonal Samling's* medievalism did not sit well with the majority population. Following the surrender of German forces

in Norway in May 1945, the Norwegian resistance removed the traces of *Nasjonal Samling's* monument at Stiklestad, and physically cleansed the site of its fascist past. In the wake of this process, the publication of medievalism in Norway fell to almost nothing.<sup>24</sup>

However, those works, such as Olav Gullvåg's book *Menneske og Helgen Olav Haraldsson (Olaf Haraldson: Man and Saint)* from 1946<sup>25</sup> and the completion of Oslo City Hall in 1947,<sup>26</sup> resemble the 1930s aesthetics and understanding of Olaf II and the Norwegian past, meaning the Second World War was not a definite moment of change in Norwegian culture and consciousness. This trend of limited production of medievalism changed with the 1954 premiere of Gullvåg and Paul Okkenhaug's *Spelet om Heilag Olav*, which was the first play of its type in Norway and started a trend of locally grounded saga plays known as *Spel*.<sup>27</sup> These *Spel*, or history plays, draw extensively on local history or myths, are often connected to a particular site and are immensely popular. According to Solveig Nessa, these plays first emerged in Norway with Gullvåg and Okkenhaug's play in 1954.<sup>28</sup> However, these plays in general, and Gullvåg and Okkenhaug's play in particular, are part of a longer tradition of folk theatre. In addition, *Spelet om Heilag Olav* draws extensively on Gullvåg's previous work on Olaf II such as his 1946 book and the 1930 cantata *Heimferd*,<sup>29</sup> and translates his ideas to a wider audience. The similarities between Gullvåg's three visions of Olaf are striking, and perpetuate a set of core ideas. First, the idea of Olaf as a national hero; second, Olaf's religious awakening the night before the battle of Stiklestad was the light that converted Norway; and third, that Olaf the saint was more important to Norway than Olaf the king.<sup>30</sup> All of these readings of Olaf emerge from Gullvåg's texts and reflect the wider historical understanding of Olaf popularized around the 900-year anniversary of his death in 1930: namely Olaf as a national saint and hero. The key to the success of this play, and the historical plays in general in Norway, might be due to two factors: the population's widespread historical knowledge and the relationship of the plays with an authoritative narrative of the national past.

Snorri's perceived 'authoritative' status served Gullvåg, as well as later authors, with a historical text they could use as basis for 'authoritative' narratives about the medieval past. It is, therefore, not surprising that many of the most famous and successful productions of late twentieth-century medievalism in Norway draw directly on this text, such as Henriksen's debut novel *The Silverhammer* in 1961, the first volume of the *Sigríð-trilogy* (1961–3).<sup>31</sup> With the publication of Henriksen's novels, medievalism and the medieval – and especially the Norse medieval – regained some traction in Norwegian cultural production, first and foremost as a comparison to and critique of the contemporary industrial society, but also as escapism from the dire post-war economic reality.

Following this revival, during the 1970s and 1980s, medievalism diversified and benefited from new critical approaches in historical thought and perspectives with regard to local and regional history and sought to recover the medieval past of the districts rather than a nationally based one. This meant that medievalist historical plays drew inspirations from local medieval legends and historical events as well as references from *Heimskringla*. This strain in Norwegian medievalism seems to have grown out of a growing local historical consciousness that underpins local identities. As

a result of this, local medieval history is still a strong trend in Norwegian medievalism; among the many products of this period are Helgesen and Verne's play *Ragnhilds Drøm* and Rolf Losnegård's play about St Sunniva at Kinn.<sup>32</sup> The late 1980s also saw the production of the movie *Pathfinder* (1987),<sup>33</sup> which shows the pre-industrial Sami society under the threat of raids from the East. The historical foundation for this production is based in many local legends from Northern Norway about the man who led the raiding party to their death, while he himself survived by tricking them and defending his community. This film can be seen as an attempt by the Sami community to de-colonize their historical past as it seeks to depict and engage with their own indigenous historical experience. *Pathfinder* must be read in the wider context of the post-colonial rebellions of 1980s Norway and the fight for Sami representation and identity; in this context, the film follows the wider patterns of the 1970s and 1980s, by deconstructing the national narratives and its universality as historical truths for the people of Norway. Yet the national narrative still had its appeal, and in 1994 the Winter Olympics at Lillehammer and the EU referendum saw a revival of ethnic nationalism and historicism using symbols taken from the Middle Ages. But unlike the pre-1980s national focus, the 1994 nationalism acknowledged that Norway was a land of two peoples – the Norwegians and the Sami.<sup>34</sup>

This ethnic-national focus also spilled over in literary medievalism such as Henriksen's youth trilogy *Skipet uten drage* (*The Ship without a Dragon*) (1990–2). Although the book series engages with contemporary questions of identity, migration, the other, the self, religion and the gender balance of society, it also perpetuates the national myth that the original populations of the North Atlantic Islands were Norwegian. The books are set in the late ninth century and follow the migration of the family of Aud 'the Deepminded' from Caithness to Iceland via Orkney, Shetland and the Faeroe Islands and give an account of their experiences of the migration. The 1980s and 1990s also saw the rise of pockets of far-right nationalism and medievalism in Norway. These communities and their uses of the past will not be explored here, but they are worth a more detailed analysis in the future. Compared to this, Norwegian post-2000 medievalism is both tamer and more extreme; for one cannot ignore the medievalism of Anders Behring Breivik, which already has been examined by Andrew Elliott and Daniell Wollenberg.<sup>35</sup> Conversely, the 2000s saw an increase in popularity of historical productions that draw on the medieval past. One example is the opera production *Quirini* at the small island community of Røst. *Quirini* commemorates the visit of the Venetian merchant, Pietro Querini, to the island in the fifteenth century and his introduction to the Norwegian stockfish – an event which local merchants, in the Lofoten Islands, herald as the origins of profitably modern stockfish trade with Italy.<sup>36</sup> Within these trends, Gullvåg's work represents the early stages of Norwegian re-engagement with the medieval following the Nazi abuse of the past. Whereas the early works of Henriksen illustrate the broader appeal of the medieval in the 1960s and 1970s, these books, along with her later work, also reflect the ideas of second-wave feminism by seeking to reclaim women's history. Helgesen and Verne's works also represent a similar trend of reclaiming the past, but this time in the 1970s–2000s local and regional revival, which is intrinsically bound to the relationship between the local and the national. Among these samples, this study will explore how authenticity

and notions of accuracy are presented and validated to the audience by the uses of landscape and gender norms.

Of all of these examples, Gullvåg and Henriksen's works can, on the basis of their popularity, be claimed to have been both the best received and the most influential and for this reason this chapter will focus on these works. As Gullvåg and Henriksen utilize gender and the landscape slightly differently, a closer examination of their works will highlight the variations in the use of landscape and gender in Norwegian medievalism.

## Authenticity and grounding of Gullvåg's work

In his play *Spelet om Heilag Olav*, Gullvåg focuses on presenting Olaf II Haraldsson and the transformation of the King in the last hours on earth, but at the core of the text, and the performances of the play, is the presentation of Olaf's masculinity. The actors who have been selected to play Olaf since the premier in 1954 have consistently been men whose charisma and acting skills construct a rugged hyper-masculine look trying to embody a sense of stereotypical 'Vikingness'. Actors such as Erik Hivju and Nils Ole Oftebro were exceptional in highlighting this in their presentations of Olaf.<sup>37</sup> This role presents Olaf as a hard man unable to overcome his differences with the farmers and aristocracy at the beginning of the play,<sup>38</sup> at the end of the play Olaf's stubbornness mellows due to the individuals and situations he encounters through the narrative. These encounters expose the role of Olaf to the nuanced reality of conversion and cultural syncretism in late Viking Age Norway. This awakening to the cultural syncretism of the age foreshadows in many ways Olaf's role as a cultural guardian and patron saint of the people, protecting them from their old pre-Christian beliefs and practices following his death.<sup>39</sup>

The role and development of Olaf in this play develop particularly through his interaction with Gudrun, one of the leading female characters; she is a nominal Christian youth who has been baptised but also instructed in pre-Christian folklore by her grandfather and her father's pagan servants. Her character relies extensively on her presentation as an escapist child trying to deal with her parents' problematic relationship and the infanticide of her brother. In her escapism, she finds solace in dance, play and song: activities all presented as distinctly feminine and opposite to Olaf's warrior masculinity when read through her body and movements. During the course of the play, Olaf becomes aware of Gudrun's play and recital of traditional lore, and questions this in a show of force and dominance critiquing Gudrun for not being a proper Christian. Gudrun's innocence along with her femininity contributes to the change in Olaf, mellowing his harshness and converting the Viking to a saint. By emphasizing the shift in Olaf, Gullvåg's Olaf engages directly with the literary presentations of Viking behaviour, as well as *Heimskringla* accounts of Olaf's personality. In doing so, he caters to the pre-conceptions of the audience and their understandings. By emphasizing the overt masculinity of Olaf, and the military behaviour of other male characters in the play, the play conforms to comfortable stereotypes of historical gender norms among the audience. At the same time of the fictive setting of the narrative, the farm Suul, reimaged on the slopes of the fields of Stiklestad, also contributes to a historical



grounding for the play. By producing the play at Stiklestad, the play projects the events at the real local farm of Suul (sometimes spelled Sul) onto the site of Stiklestad, re-enforcing its narrative through the direct interaction with the site.

Yet what is this site and landscape the play is using? And why is it important? The short answer is that it is the site of the battle itself, while the more complicated version is the play draws on the pre-existing emotional narratives and energy connected with the site of Stiklestad through the invocation of the Olavian narrative and later the re-telling of the battle through a nationalist prism. Such an invocation is consciously and unconsciously done through the site's use as the backdrop of the play, while the battle in 1030 forms the culmination of the play narrative. This invocation of the site and its narrative is particularly visible in the play programmes issued each year, and the 2015 programme is no exception. In it, we find a statement which links the site, the history and its legacy, and invokes this in the mind of the audience:

The state, the monarchy, and the church in Norway have their origin in the events at Stiklestad.<sup>40</sup>

As such, the site of Stiklestad as a site of memory is itself invoked as a particular validating factor for the events and interactions in the play, a validation not unlike that which we find in Helgesen and Verne's use of the archaeological landscape in *Skjerstad* as mentioned earlier. This use of masculinity and a particular site and landscape differs from the tactics employed by Henriksen in her work.

### Henriksen's attempts at accuracy and connectivity to experiences

In her writings, Henriksen develops her own literary expression and interaction with the past through the use of 'timeless' experiences of life and the natural landscape, the perspectives of gender and use of historical records. For like her predecessor Sigrid Undset, Henriksen masters the balancing act between fidelity to sources and creating engaging narratives set in the past. Henriksen painstakingly matches her narrative up to her sources. This is evident in the third book of both the *Sigrid-trilogy* and *Skipet uten drage*, where she includes a detailed analysis of the relationship between the sources and her novels.<sup>41</sup> By including this she helps readers to navigate the past, but also helps us understand the methodology behind her work, including the use of gender and landscape. Due to the attention to detail in her work, by including detailed accounts of the role of women in the conversion to Christianity and the experiences of growing up fast in a harsh and cruel world, Henriksen attempts to construct a medieval realism and a relatability of the human experience across eons. Henriksen's attempts to construct a relatable medieval world is a product of her mind, thus the relatability to the characters and experiences she writes are entirely dependent on her own mitigation of the historical sources and understanding of the human condition. In depicting the experiences of Sigrid, Aud and Aud's adolescent grandson, Olav Torsteinsson, Henriksen gives agency and voices to individuals whose stories are included in the

Norse literature, but whose voices, thoughts and feelings are lost to us. In her 1982 book *Sjebneveven: Om Sagaen kvinner (Fate: About the Saga Women)* Henriksen explores the rationale behind her medievalism and wider literary work, claiming that she seeks to explore how the women of the sagas would have experienced their own time and its relationship with our experiences of our own context.<sup>42</sup> Through giving agency to her characters, she uses gender and a gendered experience of life to bring realism and relatability into her texts, which grounds them in a feeling of authenticity. In doing so, Henriksen constructs an 'authentic' past by drawing on commonly held ideas and myths about gender, and as such she invokes the readers' preconceptions about the age and projects her own stories into the readers' existing frame of reference. Thus, presenting her characters' fairly modern lives and concerns through the frame of the Viking Age gives her texts an 'authentic' feel. The idea that these historical experiences and behaviours are authentic is furthered by Henriksen through her extensive use of notes and sources, among which is Snorri's *Heimskringla*, which again lends her a veneer of historical accuracy through the popular acceptance of Snorri's status as an authority on early Norwegian history.

As her medievalism is designed to be read rather than watched, Henriksen uses landscape descriptions and place names to create a sense of place as a setting for her books. Furthermore, she also references ideas of a shared cultural and linguistic community in the North Atlantic, making her texts sit in a wider cultural narrative and thus relatable to a wider audience familiar with the myths of cultural kinship among the Norse settlements in the North Atlantic. While Gullvåg's landscape is an authenticating anchor for his narrative connecting the audience to the here and now, Henriksen's landscape contributes to the realism of her narratives by reminding the reader of the vastness of the Norse world, while also re-affirming the imagined community<sup>43</sup> between Norway and the Atlantic colonies and drawing on the emotional bond related to the Norwegian membership in this community to authenticate her narrative set in the medieval. Through the use of these emotional narratives and active agency based on experiences, she uses gender and landscape as tools to capture the readers in grounded and experientially relatable stories about human lives not dissimilar to those of the readers of Henriksen's own time.

## Imagining a relatable past in Helgesen and Verne

Similar to Henriksen's work, Helgesen and Verne extrapolate their narrative from a short reference found in Snorri's *Heimskringla* about the conversion of Salten in Hålogaland. In this reference, Snorri informs us that Olaf Tryggvason fought and captured the chieftain Raudr *inn rammi* (the Powerful) 'before giving him the choice of conversion or death'.<sup>44</sup> In the Saga, Raudr's choice of death and Olaf's execution of Raudr by snake stand out as one of the more memorable episodes of the Norwegian conversion, causing the subsequent conversion of Raudr's former home region Salten.<sup>45</sup> In his account Snorri uses specific landscapes and place names to validate his own narrative, including a reference to the maelstrom Godøystraumen, which blocks the entry to the Skjerstadfjord, heart of Salten and Raudr's home.<sup>46</sup> Building on Snorri's

name-dropping, Helgesen and Verne link the references in *Heimskringla* with the archaeological landscape at the site of Godøystraumen and the fjord within to validate the narrative in their play. As with Stiklestad, the landscape of Northern Norway, and the Skjerstadfjord in particular, is integral to the local culture, self-understanding and identity, thus tying *Ragnhilds Drøm* to a specific site in the landscape anchors it in the shared historical experience and cultural consciousness of the North.<sup>47</sup> Quite practically the play, like Snorri, name-drops the locations of the events accounted in the Saga, while at the same time uses the actual landscape for the stage and backdrop of the performance. Not unlike Stiklestad, Helgesen and Verne's play uses a specific historical landscape as their stage and the play is performed among some boathouses near the traditionally important and powerful Skjerstad village, the site of the medieval parish church and home to a significant collection of Viking Age burial mounds. By staging the play here, the play uses the fjord and its role as a temporal anchor in the lives of the people of the fjord. The fjord and mounds make up for the lack of other recognizable medieval structures, such as Stave Churches, Castles or Manors in the district, and take on the role of the visual veneer transporting the audience into a moment where they are familiar with and open to the authenticity of the play and its content. Consequently, Bjerck's quote about the mounds can be read as setting the scene for this experience, and helps to prepare the audiences' mindset for the play by reminding them of the antiquity of their land and its people.<sup>48</sup>

Within this landscape, Helgesen and Verne's play contains a broad spectre of characters, including Raudr, his daughter Ragnhild and her husband, and the people of the farm and chieftom. Like the landscape they live in, their behaviour and interaction reflect the historical experience of life in the North, which also helps to transport the audience back through the years and authenticate their experience of the play. For instance, Ragnhild, like many North-Norwegian women through the centuries, is a strong independent woman left in charge of the farm and its people while worrying about the future of her child and the likelihood of her husband and father returning from their expedition at sea. Her gender is, as Løkka suggested, defined by her relationship to her father, husband and child,<sup>49</sup> but also references the reality of pre-industrial gender roles in her management of the farm – in the temporary absence of her male kin during the opening scenes of the play. Ragnhild's gender is further elaborated through her style of dress and by her mother's life story; the audience are introduced to the story during the performance and are told that Ragnhild's mother was kidnapped from her family in Ireland to become wife to a chieftain in the North of Norway. In telling this story, Helgesen and Verne introduce the audience to the reality of human trafficking during the Viking Age and at the same time add to the image of the brutality of the pre-Christian period. At the same time, they also engage with the myth of the impact of the Irish church on the conversion of Norway through cultural contact. For as the play develops, Ragnhild starts to remember an Irish lullaby which she learned from her mother about the Virgin Mary and it helps her in her role as cultural mediator to guide her people to accept the new faith and the authority of King Olaf I Tryggvason. Through this journey of remembering, Ragnhild is given agency and a voice to impact the future of her people within the confines of the societal norms of a patriarchal society and within the perceived norms of the Viking Age.

## Conclusion – gender, visibility and narrative

As suggested earlier, the narratives of modern Norwegian medievalism are infused by images of and references to landscapes and sites of cultural significance. By including these features, the authors and producers push the audience to remember and connect with the cultural heritage of the Norwegian nation. Via these invocations of the sites and landscapes of memory, the consumers of medievalism are shown a past by the invisibility of historical markers and encounter the past in the mundanity of their day-to-day landscape. With the landscape being a historically important factor in the human experience of Norway, the use of the cultural landscape as an authenticator and foundation for 'accuracy' in medievalism furthers the Norwegian relationship with the landscape, but also re-emphasizes the idea of Norway as an ancient and natural cultural unit that has stood the test of time. These reiterations and uses of the landscape suggest that an underlying feature of these productions is the constant reaffirming of national unity and cohesion continuing the trends from the nineteenth century. The slight shift from a male-dominated corpus to a slightly more nuanced gender landscape implies that the concerns of national unity and provision of an authentic and immersive depiction of the deeds of past generations will continue to shape Norwegian medievalism, even if it makes space for new voices.

The depiction of Helgesen and Verne's Ragnhild shares key similarities with Aud, Sigrid and Gudrun, and with Olaf and Raudr in that, beyond their costumes, these characters are meant to give the audience an illusion of having stepped into a premodern patriarchal society where both men and women are tough, and the history is real. The increased visibility and agency of female characters within Norwegian medievalism has asserted the realism of the narrative, but also regurgitated the illusion of the limitations of political and economic agency for women in a premodern world. Giving medievalism more depth and experiential grounding for the audience, and thus making it more relatable, the narrative remains the 'accurate' actions of our father, but it is now seen and authenticated through the lives of our mothers.

## Notes

- 1 Hein Bjartman Bjerck, *Programme for Ragnhilds Drøm: Sagaspillet 2010* (Skjerstad, 2010); all translations are my own.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Karl Christian Alvestad, *Kings, Heroes and Ships: The Use of Historical Characters in Nineteenth - and Twentieth - Century Perceptions of the Early Medieval Scandinavian Past*, Unpublished PhD Thesis (Winchester: University of Winchester, 2016).
- 4 The gap in analysis for the period 1940–5 is due to a number of reasons; chief among them is the political complexity that impacts the corpus of sources in the period as this makes the analysis a coherent analysis difficult to complete and to include in the context of this chapter.
- 5 T. Pugh and A. J. Weisl, *Medievalisms: Making the Past in the Present* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 110.

- 6 Ibid., 111.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Birger Sivertsen, 'Historisk materiale, myter, sagn', *spelhandboka.no* (2018) <https://spelhandboka.no/historisk-materiale-myter-sagn-2/>, accessed 1 October 2018.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Alvestad, *Kings, Heroes and Ships*, 70.
- 11 Karl Christian Alvestad, 'Neither Dane, Nor Swede, and Definitely Not Finn; Transmission of Narratives of Otherness in 19th- and Early 20th-Century Norwegian Historiography', *Revue d'Histoire Nordique* 23, no. 2 (2016): 105–20.
- 12 Kjell Olsen, *Identities, Ethnicities and Borderzones* (Stamsund: Orkana Akademisk, 2010), 14.
- 13 Ibid., 30.
- 14 *Veiviseren [The Pathfinder]*. Norway: Filmkameratene A/S, Norway Film, 1987.
- 15 *Kautokeino Opprøret [The Kautokeino Rebellion]*. Norway: Borealis Production, Filmlance International AB; Metronome Productions, Rubicon TV AS, 2008.
- 16 Miroslav Hroch, *European Nations: Explaining Their Formation* (London: Verso, 2015), 258–9; Ruby Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory 1870–1990* (London: University of California Press, 2000), 68; Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 333–7; Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 27.
- 17 J. Bately, 'Text and Translation: The Three Parts of the Known World and the Geography of Europe North of Danube According to Orosius' *Historiae* and Its Old English Version', in *Ohthere's Voyages*, ed. J. Bately and A. Englert (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2007), 46.
- 18 Inger Birkeland, *Kulturelle Hjørnesteiner: Teoretiske og Didaktiske Perspektiver på Klimaomstilling* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2014), 64; it is worth noting that this romantic view of the Norwegian landscape has its roots in the nineteenth century, not in the Middle Ages.
- 19 P. Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24.
- 20 Alvestad, 'Neither Dane', 105–20.
- 21 Nanna Løkka, 'Vikingtidskvinnen I ettertidens lys', in *Kvinner i Vikingtid*, ed. Nancy Coleman and Nanna Løkka (Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press, 2014), 12.
- 22 Ibid., 13.
- 23 Tor Einar Fagerland and Trond Risto Nilssen, 'The Norwegian Fascist Monument at Stiklestad 1944–45', in *Historicizing the Uses of the Past*, ed. Helle Bjerg, Claudia Lenz and Erik Thorstensen (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2011), 77; Bjorn Myhre, 'The Significance of Borre', in *Heritage and Identity: Shaping the Nations of the North*, ed. J. M. Fladmark (Shaftsbury: Donhead, 2002), 22–3.
- 24 The completion of Oslo City Hall and Olav Gullvåg's 1946 book *Menneske og Helgen: Olav Haraldsson* are the exceptions here, but the overarching cultural trends of the nine years was functionality and efficiency in the reconstruction of Norway after the war.
- 25 Olav Gullvåg, *Menneske og Helgen Olav Haraldsson* (Oslo: Olaf Nordli, 1946).
- 26 Ulf Grønbold, 'Oslo Rådhus', in *Store Norske Leksikon på Nett*, [https://snl.no/Oslo\\_r%C3%A5dhus](https://snl.no/Oslo_r%C3%A5dhus), accessed 19 August 2018.

- 27 Maria Danielsen, 'Den eventyrlege historia' [The Enchanting History], in *spelhandboka.no* (2018) <https://spelhandboka.no/den-eventyrlege-historia/>, accessed 1 October 2018.
- 28 Solveig Nessa, *Utviklinga av historiske spel i Noreg* (Stavanger: University of Stavanger, 2009), 25.
- 29 Yngve Kvistad, *Stiklestad Spelet* (Oslo: Schibsted, 2003), 32.
- 30 Alvestad, *Kings, Heroes and Ships*, 156.
- 31 Karl C. Alvestad, 'Seeing Him for What He Was: Reimagining King Olaf II Haraldsson in Post-War Popular Culture', in *Premodern Rulers and Postmodern Viewers: Gender, Sex, and Power in Popular Culture*, ed. Janice North, Karl C. Alvestad and Elena Woodacre (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 286.
- 32 [Anon.] 'Om Oss' on *Kinnaspelet.no* (Online), <http://kinnaspelet.no/omoss/index.html>, accessed 1 October 2018.
- 33 *Veiviseren [The Pathfinder]*.
- 34 The historical erasure of the Finnish, Kven and other minority groups in this narrative is significant and suggests that Norway still has yet to engage with its colonial past.
- 35 Andrew Elliott, *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media: Appropriating the Middle Ages in the Twenty-First Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2017), 132–54; Daniel Wollenberg, *Medieval Imagery in Today's Politics* (Leeds: ARC Humanities Press, 2018), 23–6.
- 36 Finn H. Eriksen, 'Røst og Pietro Querinis «bidrag» til tørrfiskeksperten', in *Fiskeribladet* (29. oktober 2017), <https://fiskeribladet.no/nyheter/?artikkel=56300>, accessed 1 October 2018.
- 37 Kvistad, *Stiklestad Spelet*, 190.
- 38 Olav Gullvåg, Paul Okkenhaug, *Mus.ms.a 5967 Paul Okkenhaug: «sogar til Spelet om Heilag Olav»* (1954), 4.
- 39 L. R. Langslett and K. Ødeggård, *Olav den Hellige; Spor etter Helgenkongen* (Oslo: Oslo Press, 2011), 20.
- 40 Stiklestad Nasjonale Kultursenter, 'Historisk bakgrunn', in *Programme for Spelet om Heilag Olav* (Stiklestad: Stiklestad Nasjonale Kultursenter, 2015), 3.
- 41 Vera Henriksen, *Helgenkongen* (Oslo: Den norske bokklubben, 1962), 275; Vera Henriksen, *Skipet uten Drage: Vest i Havet* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1992), 150.
- 42 Vera Henriksen, *Skjebneveven: om sagaens kvinner* (Oslo: Grøndahl, 1982), 7.
- 43 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), 6.
- 44 Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla volume 1: The Beginnings to Olaf Trygvason*, ed. and trans. A. Finlay, and A. Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2011), 204.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 203–5.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 205.
- 47 Harald Rinde, *Nordlands Historie Volume 3: Etter 1900: Det Moderne Fylket* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2015), 14.
- 48 Bjerck, *Programme for Ragnhilds Drøm: Sagaspillet 2010*.
- 49 Løkka, 'Vikingtidskvinnen I ettertidens lys', 12.