

Hired Hands of the Nation State or Independent Artists? Political Controversies on State Support to Writers of Fiction in Norway

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Abstract

The paper is a historical study of Norwegian policy for fiction literature 1863-1963 with specific focus on an arrangement of state grants to writers of fiction called «poet's salary», which meant that the Norwegian parliament (Stortinget) assigned a life long salary to selected and «distinguished» writers so they could contribute to cultural nation building. During the one hundred years between 1863-1962 there were a lot of political controversies in the parliament about writers who were critical to the Christian faith and organisations, who criticised the bourgeois family and marriage, and who were political and cultural radicals in attitudes and values. The structure of this literature policy model made confrontations inevitable since the parliament made its decisions mainly on political grounds when controversial writers were decided for. There was no body of literature experts between the writers and the politicians. The decision procedures followed ordinary democratic procedures in the parliament, so even in cases when the parliament denied a controversial writer the poet's salary; formally it was not a political censoring.

Keywords

Poet's salary, literature policy, nation building, cultural radicalism, controversies.

Introduction: Background and Research Questions

This paper is based on a research project on Norwegian state policy for fiction literature 1863-1962.¹ For one hundred years there was a specific arrangement for state support to writers of fiction termed «poet's salary», which meant that the Norwegian parliament (Stortinget) supported poets or writers of fiction by offering annual, life long grants to a small, selected group of fiction writers who were found sufficiently «distinguished» to deserve a reward from the nation state. There were a lot of political controversies about the selection of candidates – controversies which reflected more general cultural and political conflicts in Norway during the time period 1860-1960. The political debates and conflicts in the parliament in connection with the selection of candidates are the empirical basis of my study.

My analysis rests on an extensive amount of source material covering one hundred years. Since it is a study of the political process of literature policy on a national level, my primary source material is government bills, recommendations and reports from parliamentary committees and the minutes of parliament debates.² The source material even includes selected articles from papers and journals.

But in this paper I will concentrate on four cases of controversies which are of special interest since they demonstrate the principal aspects and problems involved with the structure of the model of state grants to writers of fiction. They are: 1) The 1860s and the introduction of the system by the approval of a life long grant to Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and Henrik Ibsen, 2) 1885-1886 when the controversial writer Alexander Kielland was denied such a grant, 3) 1898 when Stortinget discussed a state salary to Arne Garborg, and 4) 1938 when the controversial poet Arnulf Øverland with a slight majority and after a harsh debate in Stortinget was assigned a poet's salary.

The principal research questions I will try to answer are the following ones:

- Why did the Norwegian parliament (Stortinget) establish a system with life long grants for selected poets – a system that lasted for a hundred years? Which were the driving forces?
- Which were the arguments put forward by Members of Parliament for and against proposed candidates?
- How can the political conflicts and controversies in connection with debates on poet's salaries be related to general cultural political contexts in Norway?

But before I address the analysis of the source material I will give foreign readers a brief description of the cultural and political situation of Norway in the mid 19th century.

The Language Problem: A Historical Paradox

In the High Middle Ages Norway had a well developed national written language with a rich literary tradition, of which the saga was the most original genre. This language was also the language used by the kings and their civil servants in their administration of the country, and it was the language of the church, in addition to Latin, of course. But from 1397 to 1814 Norway was in practice a province of Denmark, and the political, economic and cultural centre of the «twin kingdoms» moved to Copenhagen.

During the 15th century the Norwegian written language was completely replaced by Danish, in the royal administration and in the church as well. The Protestant Reformation which reached Denmark in 1536, was a political and religious event that normally strengthened the position of national languages in the church vis à vis Latin. So even in Denmark but for Norway the effect was opposite: The Reformation came to put a definite end to the use of written Norwegian, from around 1550 all religious literature, the Bible as well as psalms, were written in Danish. From now on the state, i. e. the King, controlled not only the secular but even the ecclesiastic power institutions.

The situation of the spoken language, however, was different. The broad masses of the Norwegian people – uneducated and living within the horizon of the local society – continued to speak their local dialects. But the small social elite of Norwegians who were civil servants and who had been educated at the University of Copenhagen, adapted their spoken language to the written Danish. Their everyday spoken language was phonetically Norwegian but structurally and grammatically influenced by written Danish. In 1814, towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Norway became a stake in the power play between the victorious big powers of Europe. As a compensation for Sweden's loss of Finland and likewise a reward for his efforts to beat Napoleon, Norway was «given» to Sweden and its king Karl Johan.³ This meant that after four hundred years Norway left one political union and entered another.

During the dramatic spring of 1814, in a situation where the Danish state was weakened and Karl Johan was occupied on the continent with fighting Napoleon, there arose a power vacuum in Norway that called for action. At this moment the leading social elite of civil servants and businessmen in cooperation with self owning farmers succeeded to bring together a legislative body, to work out a Constitution modelled after the principles laid down in the American and the French revolutions, to declare Norway independent and to choose the Danish prince Christian Fredrik as king.

However, when Napoleon was beaten and Karl Johan returned from the European continent it soon became evident that Christian Fredrik could not defend the country in a war against Karl Johan and Sweden. The outcome was a given fact: The Norwegians had to accept a union with Sweden. But it was of great importance that Sweden and Karl Johan in their turn accepted the new Norwegian Constitution and its legislative body (Stortinget). Thus the Swedish-Norwegian union was very different from the Danish-Norwegian one: Sweden accepted Norwegian self rule based on liberal constitutional principles whereas the Danish-Norwegian union was formed and governed according to the principles of the autocratic kingdom.

But foreign policy was solely a Swedish business.

Culturally the union with Sweden did not bring about big changes. The official written language continued to be Danish, held up by the politically leading class of higher civil servants and a small but expanding group of bourgeois businessmen. They were few in numbers but strong in terms of political and cultural influence.

This situation created a historical paradox: The Norwegian elite had won and succeeded to defend self rule in internal affairs, and part of this defence was that they stuck to the existing written language – which was Danish. Written Danish and the cultural traditions that followed the language therefore got a stronger position than ever before in the first decades after the Danish-Norwegian union was dissolved. The Norwegian elite remained Danish in cultural orientation since the Danish written language became a bulwark against Swedish influence on internal affairs. And Swedish never became an official language in Norway. When the Swedish-Norwegian union was dissolved in 1905 the Danish written language was still dominant.

A Driving Force: Nation Building

One outstanding aspect of European political history of the 19th century is the nation building process. Benedict Anderson (1983) speaks about nations as imagined communities – not as «natural» geographical, political and cultural units.⁴ In this sense nations are socially constructed. Nation building as a process is then a conscious creation of images of *commonness* – embodied in national institutions, symbols, education and culture.⁵ National identity is much about how people understand themselves – or how they want to understand themselves.

European politicians of the 19th century were occupied with creating nations with two faces – the political state nation and the cultural nation.

By 1850 it was clear that the constitutional political system in Norway had reached a high level of stability. Its foremost representatives, in the parliament (Stortinget) as well as in the government, were the civil servants, although in Stortinget their power was steadily challenged by the Members of Parliament who were elected by the farmers.⁶ Despite that the civil servants found themselves in a hegemonic position. They saw the need for a cultural image of the nation that could strengthen the Norwegian political system vis à

vis Sweden and at the same time legitimise their own power position. That is why they called upon artists and especially writers of fiction to contribute to the future image of a young cultural nation.

To Call for Poets – A Sword with Double Edges

Excellent artists – writers of fiction, painters and composers – were expected to play an important role in the construction of a cultural nation. According to the myth created by Romanticism they should be spiritual and intellectual leaders of the people. The artistic gift was considered half sacred, the artist was an independent genius, half God, half man, born to give representations of the highest morals and truths of the people in the form of artistic works. And the writers of fiction - the poets – were paid most attention to since their artistic tool was the written word. Writing – for artistic as well as for non-artistic purposes – became more and more important in the modern states of the 19th century – in schools, in business, in public administration and in media like books, journals and papers. As the quality of basic education among ordinary people improved by school reforms throughout the century, the printed word became accessible to larger groups of citizens.

This also meant that people could be influenced directly by the written language. Whereas paintings and works music first of all appealed to aesthetic taste and form, fiction literature could more directly bring messages to the public.

But Romanticism (and even liberalism) of the early 19th century did not only make the poet the voice of the people, he also became a free and independent critic of power groups in the society, be they representatives of state or private interests. From 1850 onwards when Realism and Naturalism became dominant artistic ideologies, to call upon poets to build a cultural image of the nation was a risky business: What power holders hoped for was a loyal mediator for established moral values, what they risked was to support a moral and political rebel. To support poets therefore was to choose a sword with double edges – the power elite risked to be attacked by their own protégés.

The majority of Norwegian Members of Parliament, however, were optimistic and believed that the dog does not bite the hand that feeds him when in 1863 they gave a life long state grant to the most famous Norwegian poet of the time, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. In the following decades they had to learn a new lesson.

A Model of State Grants to Writers of Fiction: Life Long Salaries to Bjørnson and Ibsen

It was a constitutional right of the parliament body to approve the state budget, and part of this work was even to approve government proposals concerning civil servants. So if the government and the parliament wanted to reward outstanding artists, one possibility was to give them positions as civil servants. This was done in 1860 when a popular poet, Andreas Munch, was appointed docent at the University of Oslo,⁷ and in 1866 he was promoted to be a professor. Although he was not an ordinary professor with clearly defined tasks at the University, the Members of Parliament could defend such a decision since it was within their normal duties.

Andreas Munch was the third poet of the century who was rewarded by the state by becoming a civil servant.⁸ This showed that both the legislative and the executive body, Stortinget and the government, were willing to pay salaries to artists who were supposed

to bring honour and prestige to the country. The selected poets got a secure income since civil servants were guaranteed to hold their positions for life time unless they broke the law or neglected their duties severely. And their duties were vaguely formulated.

A more complicated situation arose when in 1863 the Members of Parliament were faced with a government bill that proposed Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson to receive a life long salary directly from the state budget, not as a civil servant, but as a professional poet, «hired» by the state.⁹

The parliamentary committee which prepared the plenary debate in Stortinget was split in the issue so the committee report to Stortinget was not unanimous.¹⁰ A majority wanted to dismiss the government bill: They argued that the country was in a difficult economic situation and they were doubtful about the usefulness of supporting poets. The former Members of Parliament found poetry to be a luxury for the educated class and they feared the consequences if they approved the government bill: How many poets should the state pay for? Would not a vote for this grant increase the taxes and make the tax burden for the people even heavier?¹¹

Members of Parliament who came from the educated class in the cities were of the opposite opinion. Several of them argued that the poets were part of «what is progressive and honourable for the nation», the citizens did not have only material needs but also intellectual, spiritual and emotional ones.¹² And the national assembly in a small nation ought to support the cultural as well as the material development. When the question was put to the vote a large majority voted yes. Bjørnson got a modest annual salary from the state for three years, but in 1866 it was renewed and prolonged to run for the rest of his life.

In 1866 a government bill to Stortinget argued that Henrik Ibsen deserved the same honour as Bjørnson. He was a promising poet and play writer, he had obtained a favourable status in literary Europe but lived under modest economic conditions with his family in Rome. Some of Ibsen's friends mobilised to influence Stortinget and even Ibsen himself sent several letters to the government and king Karl Johan to apply for a state grant.¹³ 28 Members of Parliament also argued for Ibsen in the form of a letter to Stortinget.¹⁴ And an overwhelming majority of the representatives voted for Ibsen at the final ballot.¹⁵

With the formulas and procedures used in the cases of Bjørnson and Ibsen, and even in three other cases in the 1860s and 1870s,¹⁶ Stortinget had by precedent established a model for state salaries to writers of fiction which should last for a hundred years. All writers who had received a salary so far, wrote in Danish and they published their books on Danish publishing houses – by the simple reason that Norway at this time had no professional publishers. The national literature that Stortinget supported was, as a consequence of the language situation, a Danish literature written by Norwegian authors.¹⁷

Which were then, by principle, the implications of the model for state support to literature?

One important aspect of the model was that the salaries to the selected group of writers should not be limited in time, they should receive an annual amount of money from the state for the rest of their life. Formally Stortinget had the opportunity to reconsider its approval and stop the payment but that was problematic from an ethical point of view, and it never happened. At this point there was a clear difference between the salary and the state *scholarships* assigned to promising writers, which were normally for one year, some times for two or three years.

Another important implication was that to receive a life long salary was not only a matter of money and economic guarantee. First of all it was a matter of national honour and prestige, for the writer and for the nation. The salary should only be given to writers who were acknowledged and «deserved» the honour to be paid by the nation, they should be protected against future economic problems so they could concentrate on their calling and continue to create distinguished works for the people and the nation.

A third principle must be mentioned: Stortinget, i. e. the publicly elected *politicians*, discussed and decided which writers should be honoured with a salary, and their approvals were *political* decisions. Members of Parliament were in principle amateurs with respect to aesthetic or artistic quality, and there was no body of independent experts who advised them. Norway did not have an academy of letters, the country was too small and did not have a strong upper class which could hold up such an institution. And, as I have pointed to before, the country did not have its full sovereignty.

The Members of Parliament took a personal attitude in single matters, i. e. to the literary quality, the morals and the social values of each writer. Structurally there was in this model a risk for political and moral censorship. As long as the selected writers were in line with established morals and social and political values, there was no problem. But what would happen if a writer rebelled against basic moral values, attacked the political establishment and became a spokesman for «dangerous» attitudes?

This problem was fully highlighted in 1885-1886 when Stortinget discussed a proposal about state salary to the novelist and short story writer Alexander Kielland (1849-1906).

The Political Context of the Kielland Case

The Kielland case is of special interest since it created political and cultural conflicts that had decisive consequences for Norwegian politics on top level. Never before or later in Norwegian politics have literature and politics been so deeply integrated, and better than any other case it demonstrates the structural conflict implied in the Norwegian model of state support to writers of fiction.

To make the Kielland case understandable for an international public I will first give a brief presentation of the main political conflicts of Norway in the 1870s and 1880s.¹⁸ In 1884 the two first political parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives,¹⁹ were established. These parties were the result of two political alliances gradually developed in Stortinget (the parliament).

The Conservatives were an alliance between members of the government and Members of Parliament who by background were civil servants with a university education or as businessmen. The class of civil servants formed the majority of the Conservatives and held a hegemonic position. Before 1884 the ministers were civil servants and not responsible to a majority in Stortinget, but the government policy was supported by the group of civil servant representatives in Stortinget. The civil servant class was conservative in social, religious and moral values. They stuck to the Danish written language and were culturally oriented towards upper class traditions from the European continent and England. But in economic questions they were liberalistic. They did not want to extend the right to vote to the working class or people without property – and of course not to women. And they did not want to make the government dependent on a majority in the parliament (Stortinget).

The Liberals were an alliance of farmers and urban intellectuals – artists, academics and people in liberal professions. What united these two groups, which were very different with respect to cultural capital and social background, was common enemy – the Conservatives. Constitutionally and politically the Liberals spoke for parliamentarism, decentralisation of political power, extension of the suffrage and a more national language policy.

The Liberals aspired to represent the broad masses of the people. But the electorate and the representatives of the two wings of Liberals were deeply split in cultural and religious questions:

The farmer wing of the party was orthodox and traditional in religious and moral issues, many of them came from western and southern Norway where the Christian layman movement was strong. They were conservative in values but liberal-radical in economic policies and opposed the hegemonic position of the civil servant class.

The urban wing of the party, with well known intellectuals, academics and artists as their spokesmen, were cultural radicals strongly influenced by modern European philosophy and science, they were sceptical about or hostile to Christianity, they were critical to institutions like the church, the school, the bourgeois family and the marriage. They were also liberal-radical in economic policies. The overall objective of their political actions was to reduce the power of the civil servants in the government by introducing a parliamentary system which made the government dependent on a majority in Stortinget. Their most outstanding leaders were Johan Sverdrup and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson – the popular poet.

What is important to bear in mind in the following sections of my text is that the Liberal party was a fragile alliance of people, and since the party was a new organisation (1884), the party discipline was weak.

« (...) there is poison on his pen»

In February 1885, from Paris, Bjørnson and his colleague Jonas Lie, wrote a letter to Stortinget, in which they proposed that Stortinget should approve Alexander Kielland a poet's salary. They argued that Kielland deserved economic support as much as they did, and wrote that in a small nation the writers needed state grants to be able to develop themselves as artists and to be able to «stand for new attitudes to life and to defend opinions independent of the opinions of the masses».²⁰

Alexander Kielland was a controversial writer, in his short stories and in his novels he had attacked the clergy and the Christian church, the school, the civil servant class and the bourgeois family. In Alexander Kielland the politicians met the modern writer as rebel, not as national hero. Bjørnson and Lie knew it was necessary to put forward the argument that the writer ought to be an independent person in relation to power holders, otherwise he could not live up to the principle of artistic freedom and the ideal of artistic truth. This was an appeal to the Liberal party and its promises and obligations to defend classical liberal principles of freedom and rights.

Since the letter was directly addressed to Stortinget and not to the government, it was first handled by a parliamentary committee.²¹ A majority of the committee – 8 of 9 – did not recommend a state grant to Kielland, and their principal argument was that Kielland was a writer who «is in conflict with the moral and religious concepts that are supported by a majority in the nation».²²

The debate in Stortinget that followed lasted for two days and became a bitter confrontation between the two wings of the Liberal party. What made the situation even more complicated for the Liberals, was that the Prime Minister, who was now the leader of the Liberals, Johan Sverdrup, did not say one word in the debate. He had even tried to stop the proposal before it reached Stortinget since he knew it was explosive stuff and he feared that the party could fall apart. If the party conflict was demonstrated in Stortinget by a ballot where one of the wings of the party voted against its own government, the parliamentary basis of the Liberal government would be in danger. That was what Sverdrup wanted to avoid and his strategy was to remain silent. Nobody knew the opinion of the government and the Prime Minister!

The representatives of the Conservatives also remained silent – for tactical reasons: They were all against Kielland, and it was clear that in the final ballot they would vote no, the question was how many of the Liberal representatives would follow them. If there was a majority against Kielland, the Conservatives would obtain two things: They could deny an anti-Conservative writer the honourable state salary and they could demonstrate the internal problems and conflicts of the governing Liberal party. So they kept their mouth shut and listened to the verbal fight between the Liberals.

The Members of Parliament from the Christian wing of Liberals mobilised all their efforts to convince those of their party colleagues who were in doubt that Kielland represented values that could break down the moral fundament of the nation, which was Christianity, the church and the traditional family. Kielland was considered dangerous to young people, his seductive and destructive moral attitudes could lead them and the country into a moral crisis that even threatened the state. As one of Kiellands strongest adversaries put it: « (...) there is poison on his pen».²³

Another of the Christian Members of Parliament asserted that Kielland in his writings was an enemy of the people and that his works were «an insult to the Norwegian people».²⁴ Kielland was even accused of being aristocratic and arrogant.²⁵

But none of his adversaries would deny Kielland to write publicly what he stood for. On the contrary, several of them underlined that they would defend his right to practise the freedom of expression and speech. Some of them even pointed out Kiellands literary qualities and praised his attacks on injustice and hypocrisy. But that was one thing, it was quite another to give a *national reward* to a writer who publicly had shown his contempt for Christian values and institutions. Their argument was namely that if Stortinget assigned the poet's salary to a writer, the state acknowledged and legitimised his or her works. If Stortinget approved a grant to Kielland, they also approved his idea that the moral of the people and the state should be based on human reason and will alone – not the Christian faith. That was not acceptable.

The cultural radical wing of Liberals – often termed as «the Europeans» - in their turn argued that Kielland was not an anti-Christian but a writer who revealed religious hypocrisy, «a man who is fighting for the truth and who is struggling for a better position for the truth in society».²⁶ And they asked: Should the state only reward artists who had a Christian faith? No, they answered, it is no better that the majority does injustice to the minority than that the minority does injustice to the majority. They argued for tolerance, respect for the freedom of expression and tried to convince their party colleagues that modern writers of the realistic and naturalistic schools must be free to express whatever they wanted and they were not obliged to pay respect to established morals and religions, be it Christian or not. If Stortinget denied Kielland a state grant that would be a censoring, according to their opinion.

The two wings of the Liberal party obviously had very separate views on the social role of a writer. The Christian representatives were of the opinion that a writer who received a life long grant from the nation state should represent moral attitudes that were approved by a majority of the population, i. e. the Christian moral. «The Europeans» saw the writer as an independent, free individual, a rebel and a national hero at the same time, but no politician could tell the writer which moral values he or she should speak for.

When the question was put to ballot, the proposal to assign Kielland a poet's salary was rejected with 60 contra 49 votes. The cultural radical wing of the Liberals lost because their Christian colleagues formed an «unsacred» alliance with the Conservatives, who unanimously voted no.

The no to Kielland gave birth to an intense debate in papers and journals. The larger part of the liberal press criticised Stortinget, and the Prime Minister Johan Sverdrup was accused of having let his party, his own ideals and his party colleagues down in a situation that called for leadership and courage. Gradually Sverdrup lost control over the party, and in 1888 the Liberal party was split in two. The Conservatives won the election that same year. The Kielland case was of course not the only reason, but it contributed substantially to the party division and the political defeat of the Liberals.

The most prominent Norwegian historian at the time and even the ideological leader of the Liberals, professor J. E. Sars, wrote in an article that «During the struggle with the Conservatives the liberal clericalism has turned out its *liberal* nature, now is the time that it turns out its *clerical* nature».²⁷ With these words Sars expressed the general disappointment of the radical wing of the party. The case was even discussed by Stortinget in 1886 and 1887, with the same result after each voting.

So Stortinget said no three times, but was the decision made by Stortinget an example of political and moral censoring?

From a formal and judicial point of view the answer of this question must be no. Kielland was never hindered or denied to express his attitudes and opinions publicly, and no writer had a judicial right to a state salary. Stortinget was in its right to decide who should be assigned such a reward, and it was up to each individual Member of Parliament to vote according to his own conscience. Whether such individual decisions were made on moral, political or aesthetical grounds, was impossible to say. The formal procedures were democratic and did not deviate from ordinary political debates. Debates on grants to artists could be compared directly to discussions on money for a piece of public road. Politically the artist was not considered to be more «specific» than people in other professions that Stortinget dealt with.

My conclusion therefore is that the decision made in the Kielland case was a consequence of the *structural character* of the arrangement with the poets's salary. Since there was no intermediate body of experts between the writers and the politicians who could give advice on other than moral and political criteria to the Members of Parliament, the decisions were completely dependent on the moral and ideological attitudes that dominated Stortinget. In some cases, when the candidates were not controversial, this did not cause any problem and the political parties could easily reach a consensus on literary arguments. But it was impossible to know when the next moral and ideological storm would blow up.

The 1890s: The New Language Movement and the National Reward to Arne Garborg

When the political storm in connection with the Kielland case was over, a ten years peace reigned in the field of literature policy. During the 1890s three important events with relevance to the policy area must be mentioned: In 1893 The Norwegian Association of Writers was established,²⁸ a new law on the rights of writers and artists was approved by Stortinget also in 1893, and in 1896 Norway signed the Bern Convention, which guaranteed the judicial and economic rights of Norwegian writers when their works were translated abroad. This meant that the social field of literature became more professional and institutionalized.

As mentioned before, the Danish written language dominated the literary as well as other social fields. But at the turn of the century Danish was no longer in a monopolistic position. Around 1850 a self educated linguistic genius, Ivar Aasen, had reconstructed the old Norwegian written language from the High Medieval Ages and modified it by adapting it to the basic structure of contemporary Norwegian dialects. Aasen named his language 'landsmål' which means 'the language for the whole country' – and consequently it was intended to be a Norwegian alternative to Danish. Aasens written language was rooted in a Norwegian historical language tradition, and therefore its adherents argued that it was more 'national' and 'genuine' than Danish in Norway. In addition they argued that it was more democratic since its modern normative basis was the spoken language of ordinary people. And this was of course unusual since written national languages normally were constructed on the spoken language of the upper classes in the capital cities.

Thus the language issue became part of the political agenda. The Conservatives, representing the social elite, defended the Danish language since the Danish written language was a symbolic expression of their power interests. On the opposite the 'landsmål' became a matter of democratic principle for the Liberal party. During the 1880s and the 1890s, when the Liberal party had a majority in Stortinget, 'landsmål' was by law made judicially equal to Danish²⁹ - in the school, in public administration and in the church.

The most famous writer – of novels, of poetry but also of essays and not-fiction prose, even as a journalist - of the 'landsmål' was Arne Garborg (1851-1924). In the 1880s he was liberal and radical – a «European» - in moral and political questions, and he sympathised with Bjørnson, who was a leading figure among the left wing of Liberals. In 1882 Stortinget denied him a scholarship so he was a controversial writer. His novels in the 1880s³⁰ confirmed this impression. Several times in the 1890s he was proposed to receive a poet's salary but it was not until 1898 that there was a majority for him in Stortinget.³¹ At this stage Garborg had to some extent distanced himself from cultural radicalism and turned to national cultural questions, in the first place the language question. He was the foremost spokesman of the 'landsmål' movement which by now had become a powerful lobby in Stortinget and in the Liberal party. And when Stortinget discussed the issue of a poet's salary to Garborg in 1898 it was his contribution to promote the 'landsmål' that gave him the national reward that the poet's salary was esteemed to be. In the debate some Members of Parliament asserted that this should be the only reason for supporting Garborg because they wanted to do away with the whole arrangement with Stortinget discussing single writers. Despite this Garborg was honoured *both* as a poet *and* a national language creator.³² On the other hand: But for his efforts in the language question it is unlikely that he had acquired a poet's salary.

The Second Phase of Cultural Radicalism: Psychoanalysis and Marxism

We are now making a jump in time to the interwar years, more precisely to the 1920s and 1930s. The most controversial Norwegian poet in these years, especially in the 1930s, was Arnulf Øverland (1889-1968). When the Norwegian Labour government proposed to reward him as an outstanding poet in 1938 it created a veritable storm in Stortinget – a storm that in character and strength reminded very much of the Kielland case. Like in 1885 the Christian and conservative Members of Parliament were challenged since they were asked to approve state support to a writer who through many years had publicly attacked what they stood for – morally, culturally and politically.

From the early 1920s Øverland and several Norwegian writers³³ were considerably influenced by Freud's psychoanalysis, which was introduced by intellectuals in cultural and literary journals. Freud's works were also translated into Norwegian. The other source of influence in radical circles was Marxism. Øverland was politically active in the newly established Communist party from 1923 to 1937, in a pro-communist organisation of academics called Mot Dag³⁴ until 1936, but when Stalin's Moscow processes became publicly known, he turned to the social democrats, i. e. the Labour party. He was a devoted anti-fascist and never missed an opportunity to warn about the Nazis in the 1930s.

The psychoanalysis and Freud's theories about sexuality convinced him that the Christian faith, the bourgeois family, the Christian school and the church were oppressive institutions that underpinned class differences and were ideological instruments in the hands of power elites. The Christian faith made it impossible for individuals to become free. In a sarcastic and ironic style he wrote articles and gave public speeches where he attacked all Christians and accused them of suppressing sexual feelings and thereby creating a social neurosis.³⁵

When the Labour government proposed that Øverland deserved to receive a salary from the nation state,³⁶ Stortinget was immediately split in two blocks: A Christian wing, which this time consisted of representatives of the Christian Democratic party, the Conservatives, the Liberals (now being a party in the political centre) and the Farmers' party, were against Øverland; the Labour party and a few representatives of the Liberal and Farmers' party argued for him. The arguments put forward in the debate for and against were quite similar to the ones in the Kielland case – and to make a debate that went on for two days very short: Christian values and moral opposed to liberal artistic freedom and tolerance.

There was one important difference between the outcome of the Kielland case and the Øverland case: A slight majority of 77 contra 71 approved a poet's salary to Øverland,³⁷ and this time it was the party discipline of the Labour party that saved the liberal principles of artistic freedom and tolerance. All Labour party Members of Parliament - 70 representatives – voted for, in addition to 7 «traitors» from the bourgeois block.

Conclusions

The Øverland case was the last really harsh and bitter debate about a poet's salary in Stortinget. Some smaller quarrels took place also in the 1950s but compared to the Kielland and Øverland storms they were only weak breezes. The whole arrangement was replaced by a new organisation of the state grants to writers of fiction in 1962, in which Members of Parliament no longer handled single cases, Stortinget just approved

a lump sum of money on the yearly state budget. The life long salary was replaced by three years working scholarships, and single candidates were decided for by expert groups and representatives of the Norwegian Association of Writers.

Looking backwards one can say that the sharpest debates in Stortinget took place in periods when social, cultural and political contrasts were clear and the social conflict level in Norway was high. Fundamental national and social interests were at stake. In the debates, however, the arguments were mostly about national interests – and the political struggle was concentrated on this question: What kind of literature should the state support to serve national cultural interests? Even the Labour party representatives fought for a *national* literature but they had other views on what was acceptable within a national literary canon than Christians and Conservatives. The *social* and class interests of the Labour movement did not come directly to the fore in the parliament debates.

Political controversies about the salaries to fiction writers were from time to time inevitable since in some cases the proposed candidate represented an extreme challenge to the tolerance limits of Christians and Conservatives. In cases where the proposed writer was not controversial, culturally, morally or politically, the Members of Parliament from all parties reached consensus on literary grounds.

There might be good reasons, not least if one studies the rhetorics of the debates in Stortinget, to argue that the writers who accepted a life long salary from the state, became hired hands who had lost their artistic freedom. In my opinion to say that would be to go too far. The state did not put pressure on the single writer as to what he or she should write since the whole arrangement was established by a state that respected the liberal freedom of expression.

Notes

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² In the notes of this article referred to as St. Prp. Nr. (government bill), Indst. S. (report from parliament committee) and Stortingstidende (minutes of parliament debate).

³ Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, one of Napoleon's former generals.

⁴ Benedict Anderson (1983) *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London.

⁵ Stein Rokkan (1987) *Stat, nasjon, klasse*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo.

⁶ The Norwegian Constitution of 1814 gave the right to vote to civil servants, property owners in the towns/cities, businessmen and self owning farmers, which the majority of Norwegian farmers were.

⁷ S. No. 3 (1859), Indst. S. No. 74 (1860) and Stortingstidende (1860), p. 743-744.

⁸ The two others before him were Henrik Wergeland and Johan Sebastian Welhaven.

⁹ The relevant source materials are: S. No. 66 (1863), Inst. S. No. 98 (1863) and Stortingstidende (1863).

¹⁰ Indst. S. No. 98 (1863).

¹¹ Stortingstidende (1863), p. 525-528.

¹² Stortingstidende (1863), p.528.

¹³ J. B., Halvorsen (1892) *Norsk Forfatterlexicon 1814-1914*, p. 11-12 and 16-17.

¹⁴ Stortingstidende (1866), p. 892.

¹⁵ Stortingstidende (1866), p. 894.

¹⁶ Camilla Collett 1866, Jonas Lie 1874 and Kristofer Janson 1876.

¹⁷ The language situation changed a lot towards the end of the 19th century, a matter I will return to later in this paper.

¹⁸ An overview of this period of Norwegian history is given in Anne-Lise Seip (1997) *Nasjonens bygges 1830-1870*, Aschehougs Norgeshistorie, bind 8, Oslo, Gro Hagemann (1997) *Det moderne gjennombrudd 1870-1905*, Aschehougs Norgeshistorie, bind 9, Oslo, and Jostein Nerbøvik (1973) *Norsk historie 1870-1905*, Det Norske Samlaget, Oslo

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- ¹⁹ Venstre (Liberals) and Høyre (Conservatives).
- ²⁰ Dokument No. 66 (1885): « (...) hævde Livssyn og Meninger uafhængig af Mængdens».
- ²¹ Before a subject matter is put under debate and vote in the plenary in Stortinget, it is usually prepared by a parliamentary committee which makes a report and a recommendation to Stortinget.
- ²² Indst. S. No 187 (1885): « (...) i Modsætning til de inden Nationen herskende moralske og religiøse Begreber».
- ²³ The expression is from Edvard Liljedahls address to Stortinget, Stortingstidende (1885), p. 1211: « (...) der er Gift paa Pennen hans».
- ²⁴ Lars Oftedal in his address to Stortinget, Stortingstidende (1885), p. 1218.
- ²⁵ Kielland was born in a rich business family and his lifestyle was marked by his social background.
- ²⁶ Halvor Bentsen in his address to Stortinget, Stortingstidende (1885), p. 1208: «en Mand, der søger Sandheden, vil stræbe at fremme Sandheden i Samfunslivet».
- ²⁷ J. E. Sars (1885) «Stortingsbeslutningen vedkommende Alexander Kiellands digtergave», *Nyt Tidsskift* (1885), s. 327-336.
- ²⁸ Nils Johan Ringdal (1993) *Ordenes pris. Den norske Forfatterforening 1893-1993*, Aschehoug, Oslo, and Georg Brochmann (1952) *Den norske Forfatterforening gjennom 50 år*, Den norske Forleggerforening, Oslo.
- ²⁹ At that time often termed Danish-Norwegian or Norwegian-Danish.
- ³⁰ *Bondestudentar* (1883) and *Mannfolk* (1886).
- ³¹ Stortingstidende (1898), p. 479-483.
- ³² Stortingstidende (1898), p. 483. Garborg's salary was also bigger than the ordinary poet's salary, 2400 crowns (kroner) whereas the ordinary salary was 1600 crowns.
- ³³ Among them first of all Sigurd Hoel and Helge Krog.
- ³⁴ Directly translated 'Towards the Day', an allusion to the socialist idea about the dawn of a new socialist society.
- ³⁵ About Øverland and the cultural radicalism see Leif Longum (1986) *Drømmen om det frie mennesket. Norsk kulturradikalisme og mellomkrigstidens radikale trekløver Hoel – Krog – Øverland*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo.
- ³⁶ St. Prp. Nr. 1 (1938), kap. 227, p. 45.
- ³⁷ Stortingstidende (1938), p. 844.