



## The European Nation's Nordic Nature

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# THE EUROPEAN NATION'S

## NORDIC NATURE

BY KENNETH OLWIG

“**T**he nature of Europe is in the Nordic nations.” This statement might have been made somewhere in the heartland of Europe at any time from ancient antiquity to the present century. The meaning of the terms "nature", "nation" and "Nordic", however, has changed in subtle ways through time. The history of these changes, in turn, provides a background for an understanding of the meaning of Nordic landscape and culture for Europe, and for the Nordic nations, today.

### THE NATURAL PEOPLE OF THE NORTH

The word nature has a number of meanings which are interrelated in complex ways. One of the earliest and most primary meanings of the word is "constitution" or "character", a meaning in which the word expresses, in effect, the *identity* of something, or someone. We use the word in this way when we say: "It is the nature of the Nordic peoples to be freedom-loving." It is this meaning of the word which makes nature possibly the most value-laden word in the language. We use the word in this way when we say: "It is natural for the Nordic people to be freedom-loving and it is unnatural for them to be servile." Another word for "a people" is "nation" and this word has particular affinities to the word *nature* because both share the same root, *nat*. find the same Latin root in words such as *nat*ivity and *native*. The people of nation are the native-born, who thus share a common nature and have a *natural* birth right to it.

When Roman authors sought to find expression for the nature of the Roman people, they looked back in time to the birth of Roman Society in the golden age of founding fathers, the shepherds Romulus and Remus. Though the classical conception of nature was thus fundamentally temporal, classical authors were also aware of the fact that as one moved out in space, away from the urban core of Mediterranean civilization, one met with first agrarian then pastoral societies which seemed to preserve characteristics of the earlier more *natural* age which they identified with Romulus and Remus. Some of these authors, most notably Tacitus, looked far afield, particularly to such "northern" peoples as the Goths and the Germans, to find the last preserves of these natural values. Though these writers had some knowledge of the peoples they described, they were not primarily concerned with their ethnographic or geographic reality, but rather with their mythic qualities. They projected into these societies, and their environments, ideal, natural qualities which they felt modern Roman society lacked. The nature of these nations provided a mirror in which the Romans could look at themselves.

The classical conception of the nature of the nation involved, as noted, essentially a temporal conception of development from a natural pastoral origin. This, moreover, was a cyclical conception of temporality. Nations were born, reached urban maturity and could die, after

which they might be reborn. It is from this conception of temporality that the notion that civilization can be reborn in a "renaissance" derives. The word *naissance* of course, has the same root as *nature*, and the notion of renaissance suggests a conformity with natural temporal processes. This idea of the nature of the nation, however, had a derivative spatial parallel which is more closely related to modern conceptions of nature. According to this idea, a renaissance could not only take place in a new, distant, temporal era, but also in a new place that was distant in space. Just as the cycle of time followed the sun, each new renaissance was seen to take place in a new location further westward. Civilization could thus be seen to be reborn progressively starting, for example, in Egypt, moving to Mediterranean Greece, to Rome and from there to the North Atlantic. In these dreams of a renaissance of Western European society, the North provided an ideal as a naturally spirited, generative, source, stimulating this renewal by its love of freedom.

## NORDIC FREEDOM

The concept of natural "Nordic" freedom first gained critical ideological importance in relation to that renaissance of Christian values which the Protestants identified with the Protestant reformation. To show that Protestantism was not a revolt against the legitimate authority of Rome, but a natural development in Christianity, the theory was promulgated that the cold Germanic North provided a natural Protestant antidote to a southern Roman Catholic church which was seen to be degenerate and despotic. Just as the peoples of northern Europe once destroyed the political power of tyrannical Rome, their descendants would now destroy its religious power.

The ideology behind this idea derived ultimately from classical sources. Aristotle, for example, espoused the belief that the people from the cold countries of Europe were so "spirited" that they "continue to remain comparatively free, but attain no political development and show no capacity for governing others".

The peoples of Asia, on the other hand, were characterized as being "deficient in spirit; and this is why they continue to be subjects and slaves". In Greece, however, he found a happy medium.<sup>1</sup> An implication of his theory was that a counterbalance to despotism was to be found in the nature of the Northern nations. The "North" had particular mythic importance because of the interlocking theories of the four elements (air, water, fire, earth), the four humours (blond/sanguine, phlegm, yellow bile/choleric and black bile/melancholy) and climate, held well into the modern era by many Europeans. The cold and moist climate of the North was identified with the presence of phlegmatic humours, or bodily fluids, which, in turn, were seen to give rise to a slow and stolid, impassive temperament characterized by equanimity. Phlegm was also associated with sexuality, fertility and birth, and hence nature. The North of Europe was thus identified as "the womb of nations", in paraphrase of a statement made by the Roman/Gothic historian Jordanes (c. 550). The myth of the "icy", but sexually free, Nordic blond thus has ancient, dark roots.

In Sweden the glorification of a supposed Gothic past was cultivated by a group of seventeenth-century scholars known as the Uppsala Circle. This work was given quintessential form in Olof Rudbeck's book *Atlantica*. Swedish scholars pointed to the various Swedish Gothlands - Västergötland and Östergötland - as the likely location for the place of origin of these peoples. Ideas of this sort seem to have provided some of the ideological background to King Gustav II Adolf's dreams of glory as the "Lion of the North" in the Thirty Years War. The day before he

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, VII, vii: 1-9, trans. E. Barker (New York; Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 296-97.

made his final German campaign he reminded the Swedish Assembly of Estates of the Realm that they were descendants of the Goths. The same day that he left, on May 20, 1630, he promulgated his edict on the collection and study of the nation's antiquities, and appointed Johannes Bureus to the post of Antiquarian of the Realm.

The Swedes' identification with the Goths might explain the fact that the Danish national anthem from 1779, *King Christian*, by Johannes Ewald, depicts the brave sea king and contemporary of Gustav Adolf, Christian IV, smashing the "helmet and brain" of the Goth. But in other contexts the Danes were also quite anxious to be identified with the Goths. In the influential *Dansk Atlas* from the mid-eighteenth century the name of Jutland is seen to come from the word Goth according to the following derivation:

It is most reasonable to trace the peninsula's name from one of the first peoples who lived there, namely the Guti, Gothi, Giotae, Juti, Juter, which all mean the same as the still current "Jutlanders" These Jutes, or Jyder, who are the true Goths<sup>2</sup>

The Danish Royal Historian Paul-Henri Mallet, writing in the mid-eighteenth century, reflected Gothicist ideas when he wrote:

The great prerogative of Scandinavia (says the admirable Author of the Spirit of Laws) and what ought to recommend its inhabitants beyond every people upon earth, is, that they afforded the great resource to the liberty of Europe, that is, to almost all the liberty that is among men. The Goth Jordanes, (adds he) calls the North of Europe The Forge of Mankind. I should rather call it, the forge of those instruments which broke the fetters manufactured in the South. It was there those valiant nations were bred, who left their native climes to destroy tyrants and slaves, and to teach men that nature having made them equal, no reason could be assigned for their becoming dependent, but their mutual happiness.<sup>3</sup>

Mallet's history appeared in both French and Danish editions and was published in 1770 in an (anonymous) English translation by Bishop Thomas Percy, under the title *Northern Antiquities: or a description of the manners, customs, religion and laws of the ancient Danes and other northern nations including those of our own Saxon ancestors*. This book has been said to be the "mainspring" of "all subsequent Norse study" in Britain.<sup>4</sup>

The Gothicist thinking which Mallet promulgated is illustrative of the shift from a religious to a political focus in Gothicist discourse, which had been taking place since the seventeenth century. It also shows an influence, as the above quotation suggests, from the ideas of the Frenchman Montesquieu. It was via Montesquieu that the contours of the modern conception of the nature of the North, where nature is understood primarily in terms of landscape, began to take clear form. Mallet and Montesquieu saw a definite correlation between the cold forested environment of the Northmen and their freedom-loving character. They also believed, however, that the clearing of forests produced a warming of the climate which, in turn, made the freedom-loving, but anarchistic, Northmen more amenable to the formation of some form of proto-democratic government. The name Sweden was thus seen to derive from the "old Cimbric" *Suida*, meaning to burn, and the generation of the Swedish nation as a governed entity was itself seen to have been made possible by this burning process. The positive dimension of this forest clearing, however, was seen to have its limits. If too much forest was destroyed, then the nation would become too dry and warm, and the basis for the natural Gothic freedom of the Nordic nations would be destroyed along with the forest. The ideal ancient Gothic Society of the North was therefore envisioned as a collection of free families, living in forest clearings, uniting periodically to make decisions on behalf of the nation.

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Kenneth R. Olwig, *Nature's Ideological Landscape* (London: Allen:Unwin 1984), pp. 15-16.

<sup>3</sup> Olwig, pp. 17-18.

<sup>4</sup> Frank E. Farley, *Scandinavian Influences in the English Romantic Movement* (Boston: Ginn, 1903), pp. 30-32.

Gothic political ideology was of considerable importance both to the American rebels against British colonialism, and to British opponents of absolute monarchy, all of whom saw their nation as the inheritors of the Goths. As one influential British writer wrote in 1672: "Tis to the ancient Inhabitants of these Countries, with other neighbouring Provinces, that we owe the Original of Parliaments..."<sup>5</sup>

## THE GOTHIC LANDSCAPE

The ideology of Gothicism provided the vocabulary and syntax for a hidden discourse on politically volatile aspects of society which could not be discussed openly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth countries. It was a discourse, therefore, which had to take place under various symbolic guises - couched, for example, in terms of landscape. The landscape of nature thereby became a vehicle for the representation of ideas and ideals which were comprehensible to those who were familiar with this mode of communication, but which can be difficult to interpret today. It should also be noted that concepts such as "natural freedom" can be used and misused to represent political ideas from many different points on the political spectrum. In this way, Nordic landscapes which include forests, or remnants of forests, the physical remains of ancient monuments, as well as the genetic remains of ancient heroic peoples (in the form of peasants or shepherds), were often laden with a political meaning which is difficult to fathom today.

## THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE OF THE NORTH

We have seen how an idealized image of the Nordic peoples was developed by an assortment of Greeks, Romans, Britons and Frenchmen. This image also had a certain amount of appeal in the Nordic countries themselves. In the same way, idealized images of the Nordic natural landscape were also generated in the core areas of Europe and the images came to be idealized by the people of the Nordic countries themselves. In this respect, one might argue that the nature of the Nordic periphery was invented in the European heartland. In fact, however, the process might rather be described as being somewhat dialectical. In some respects it is easier for outsiders to grasp the salient character, or nature, of a place, than it is for the natives of that place, who know nothing else. It is not only when natives leave home, and meet others with different perspective that they can learn to see the larger contours and outlines which define the identity of their homeland. The ideal qualities imputed to the North in the ideology of Gothicism were often absurd. They could also, however, provide a useful counterbalance to the stigma and negative self-image to which a peripheral location, on the outskirts of an urban civilization, can give rise.

A classic example of the way in which core European ideas of the Nordic countries became internalized by these nations as a natural ideal, is that of the Norwegian painter Johan Christian Dahl (1788-1857). (See also p. 142.) Dahl, who came from Bergen, received his first professional training as a painter at the Royal Academy in Copenhagen in the early years of the nineteenth century. He apparently saw himself as having some sort of generalized Nordic identity - at least he regarded his Danish compatriots as countrymen. This would not have been unusual. A somewhat older compatriot, the writer Ludvig Holberg, from the same district of Norway, became so Danicized that he is regarded as the father of Danish theatre, and few Danes think of him as a Norwegian. Neither did Holberg cultivate a taste for Norwegian landscape, rather he preferred the fertile flat plane west and south of Copenhagen. Dahl was happy to paint his Danish surroundings, but he found an artistic niche for himself as the painter of wild northern scenery. Since he had never really explored such scenery, he invented an ideal

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<sup>5</sup> Olwig, pp. 11-12.

image of it on the basis of his studies of the classic masters of landscape painting, such as Claude Lorraine and Salvator Rosa. There was nothing dishonest in this. The "nature" which artists painted at that time was first and foremost an ideal, made manifest in a particular scene. It was not a specific, concrete place.

When Dahl left Copenhagen and settled in Dresden around 1820 he moved into the building where his friend, the painter Caspar David Friedrich, lived. Friedrich was born in Greifswald, which had political ties to Sweden, and he had also studied in Copenhagen. Though German-speaking, Friedrich tended to be regarded, and to see himself, as Nordic, so there was nothing "unnatural" about the common interest which the two friends, Dahl and Friedrich, developed in an imagined ideal nature of the North. The nationalist movement, and the accompanying interest in the landscape heritage of the past, was much more developed in Germany than it was in Scandinavia. It was here that Dahl eventually became actively involved in organizations engaged in the study and preservation of ancient monuments. Friedrich was also a more symbolically inclined painter than Dahl, and it is apparently from him that Dahl learned to substitute ancient Nordic monuments (such as barrows) for the classical monuments which he had painted earlier.

Dahl eventually became a highly successful member of the Dresden Academy, and when he returned to Norway, in 1826, he was a prominent European. Dahl sought and found landscapes which resembled the idealized images of nature which he had been painting all along. He also, however, discovered the cultural landscape of Norway, in many respects, on the mental map of Europe. Friedrich's more transcendental, and abstract, scenes of a symbolic wild nature, on the other hand, were less localizable to Norway.

Dahl returned to Norway several times and when he discovered that his countrymen, who were oriented toward a classical taste, were busy tearing down the ancient stave churches, he began to campaign for their restoration. After all attempts to have the church at Valdres preserved failed, he bought the church himself in 1841. It was eventually taken over by King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia, who had it taken to Germany and rebuilt in Brückenberg in Silesia (now Bierutowice in Polish Silesia). Dahl's untiring efforts eventually resulted in the establishment, in 1844, of the Society for the Preservation of Norwegian Ancient Monuments, patterned on the Royal Sächsischen Alterthums-Verein, of which Dahl was a member. To this day, Norway is a country characterized by a fierce regional identity, with considerable differences in language and style of life. It is highly possible that it was, in part, the work of people like Dahl which gave Norwegians a sense of common national identity. Perhaps it was necessary to leave Norway, as many artists and writers did, in order to gain an impression of their unifying qualities.

Though the Norwegians themselves eventually began to take an interest in the landscape heritage of Norway, foreign concern has continued to provide an impetus for this interest. A steady stream of foreign and Norwegian artists and intellectuals followed in Dahl's footsteps, for example, to Balestrand on the Sogne Fjord. They were particularly inspired by the ancient sagas retold in the 1820s by the Swedish author, Esaias Tegner, in *Frithiof's Saga*, which were thought to have taken place there. As recently as 1913 Kaiser Wilhelm erected a statue of one of the figures from this book on a grave barrow overlooking the fiord in Balestrand. On the other side of the fiord, he placed one of Frithiof himself. It is the image of Norway and its people established by these painters, intellectuals and other prominent Europeans in their home countries which has fuelled tourism to Norway. And it is the tourist industry, in turn, which has had an economic interest in preserving, or even creating, a landscape to match the expectations of visitors.

The idealized visions of Norway which first emerged in the core of Europe have long since been internalized by the Norwegians themselves. The nature of Norway is not just a tourist issue. The Goth still haunts the Norwegian identity, judging from a recent statement by the

Norwegian archaeologist, Christian Keller: "The myth of 'The Free Norwegian Farmer' confounds all research which reveals debt-ridden unfreedom. And for most Norwegians, be it laymen or professional historians, there can only be one form of agrarian settlement in Norway: the single farm."<sup>6</sup> The self-styled poetic father of the founding of the modern Norwegian State, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, who wrote the Norwegian national anthem, thus could not live in Oslo. He had to live in the countryside, on a traditional farmstead, Aulestad, which has since become an object of pilgrimage for patriotic Norwegians.

The idea that Norwegians have a special pact with nature informs everything from the Norwegian predilection for outdoor sports, to the image of Norwegian culture which it seeks to promote. Thus, when Norway spent three million kroner to promote itself at the close of the Olympics in Albertville, the popular Singer, Sissel Kyrkjebø, was posed sitting on a polar bear. This is a prelude to the cultural programme for the coming Winter Olympics in Lillehammer where, say the organizers, "nearness to nature" will be the Central theme. They will try to show how Norwegian art is affected by "the wild mountains and the deep fiords", by "Nordic mythology and Norwegian folktales".<sup>7</sup> Though this sort of thing may seem silly, it is nevertheless intimately related to the rather serious way in which Norwegians have worked to keep even remote country districts populated. Man and nature do live together in Norway, as opposed, for example, to Sweden, where vast areas have been emptied of their population.

## THE NATURE OF DENMARK

If the quintessential national landscape art of Norway can be seen to have emanated from the heartland of Europe, much the same can be said of the national "golden age" of Danish art from the same period. It has thus been argued that not only Dahl, but also the Dane Johan Thomas Lundbye was inspired by Friedrich to develop a taste for landscapes with grave barrows. Friedrich, who hailed from a Baltic region with a coastal landscape similar to Denmark's, was also a pioneer in the painting of such coastal scenes, and he is thought to have inspired Lundbye in this genre. Lundbye's equally nationalistic friend and colleague, Joachim Skovgaard, on the other hand, may have been more directly inspired by Gothicist mythology in his depiction of Danish forestscapes, with titles like "Freya's Hall". Both the beech forest and the sea coast figure in Adam Oehlenschläger's Danish national anthem from 1819, *Der er et yndigt land* (There is a lovely land), in which Denmark itself is called Freya's Hall.

Paradoxically, it was the absence of suitably Gothic forests on the Jutland heaths which made those heaths the quintessential Danish Gothic landscape. The absence of trees strengthened the visual presence of ancient monuments, particularly harrows, in the landscape. Through the work of the poet Steen Steensen Blicher, the heath came to be seen as the landscape ruin of a once forested and fertile landscape. It was this image which, in turn, helped inspire a national movement to reclaim the heath for forestry and agriculture following the Danish loss of Schleswig-Holstein in 1864. Today, the pioneers who cultivated the heath are memorialized on appropriately Gothic monoliths, erected in a special park in the heart of the former heathlands.

Even in the case of Blicher, a native of the heath, powerful foreign influences can be seen to have effected his choice of ideal natural landscape. The most notable was the pseudo-ancient epic poetry of "Ossian" which the Scot James Macpherson published in the mid-eighteenth century. Blicher's first major literary work was his translation of the poetry of the "ancient" bard Ossian, and he continued to identify with this bard throughout his life - to the point of

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<sup>6</sup> Christian Keller, "Fornminnevernets ideologiske grunnlag – en anakronisme?" *Kulturminnevernets Teori og Metode, Status 1989 og Veien Videre*, ed. Anne Ragnhild Hoel (Oslo: Rådet for humanistisk forskning, 1990), pp. 47-61 (p. 54). Translation KRO.

<sup>7</sup> Dag Yngland, "Sissel på isbjørn skal sælge OL: Norge satser på kultur og historie ved vinter-olympiaden i Lillehammer", *Politiken*, March 22, 1992, section 2, p. 7. Translation KRO.

naming his daughter after Ossian's daughter. Macpherson believed that Ossian's poetry lent expression to a North Atlantic culture that stretched from Scotland to Denmark and up the coast of Norway. The classic pose of Ossian, captured in a portrait by the Danish painter Nicolai A. Abildgaard in 1785, was sitting in the ruins of a forest, surrounded by the encroaching heather, strumming his lyre, and singing nostalgically of a lost age of national glory.

This poetry fulfilled Gothicist expectations of what ancient poetry, inspired by the sublime grandeur of northern nature, ought to be like, and it gained enormous popularity throughout Europe. For Blicher it provided a means of rehabilitating the long denigrated landscape of his home district and making it into the natural heartland of Denmark, populated by suitably phlegmatic (*stærk og sejt*) Jutlanders. Blicher did such a good job of creating an image of the heath as the epitome of the nature of Denmark that the remains of the heath are now assiduously preserved from cultivation as "nature".<sup>8</sup> In eastern Denmark, on the other hand, it is the landscapes of Lundbye and Skovgaard which set the standard for preservation.

### THE NATURE OF SWEDEN, FINLAND AND ICELAND

Though Sweden, as has been noted, has experienced many of the Gothicist intellectual currents which informed the identity of the nature of Denmark and Norway, it is, nevertheless, perhaps most notable for its divergence from the Danish and Norwegian ideals. Though the popularity of the open-air museum at Skansen and the paintings of Carl Larsson attests to the ideal of the free farmer in the Swedish taste for nature, Sweden is also characterized by a taste for nature which excludes this sort of human community. On the cover of a book which Sweden has produced to present its national parks to Europe, the subtitle is: "Europe's last wilderness". This sort of nature is less nostalgic, and backward-looking, than that of the other countries. The predominant image of Sweden is not that of peasants in thatched cottages, or Peer Gynt trolls, but one of a forward-looking, progressive, industrial nation, the home of the Volvo and the Saab jet. The nature of Sweden is more the wild nature of the pioneer and the industrialist than of a century-old peasantry. In this respect, it has a certain affinity with the Wild nature identified with America. It is hardly a coincidence that the first European nation to promulgate American-style wilderness national parks was Sweden.

Finland has a Special status in terms of its Nordic nature. It is a very young nation, and its national romanticism belongs to modern times, though it has a long heritage. There are, of course, clear parallels between the works of Ossian produced by Macpherson and the works of similar bardic figures, such as Väinämöinen, recorded by Elias Lönnrot in the Kalevala from 1835-36. It is in these works that modern artists such as Jean Sibelius and Akseli Gallen-Kallela found their inspiration, in turn promulgating an image of the forested water landscapes of eastern Finland as the apotheosis of Finnish nature. This was an image of nature which, furthermore, infused the work of the pioneers of modern Finnish architecture.

In all these fields, the international status of Finland is linked just as much to North America as to Europe. In this respect, Finland shares the more generalized Nordic identity characteristic of the Ossian epic. The location of the Kalevala stories, for example, is so suitably vague that it is difficult to place them in a specific regional context. It is, thus, less closely tied to specifically Scandinavian derivations of the Gothicist tradition. The pioneering swidden agriculturalist of Finland, carving out a family home from the forest, is well suited nevertheless to glorification as the natural backbone of the nation, in the tradition of Gothicism. The Kalevala is about such farmers, but it is also about the forging of the mythic "Sampo", apparently a sort of mill, and thus in addition it is about the kind of pioneering, industrial, use of wild nature which is also to be found in Sweden and America.

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<sup>8</sup> The story of the heath is told in detail in Olwig 1984 (see above)



Iceland plays a unique role in the story which has been related here. This country needed no constructed epics to give it a special Nordic identity. It was, as the homeland of the Sagas, certain of its status as a genuine locus of Nordic identity, and it provided much of the grist for the Gothicism mill as Gothicism became increasingly sophisticated and began to incorporate historical and mythical elements from Nordic history. This might explain the apparent stoical independence of this isolated island, swathed in the stormy, foggy seas of the North Atlantic. Iceland seems to possess so much of the freedom-loving spirit described by Aristotle that the present-day Nordic identity crisis, brought about by the ever expanding European Economic Community, appears to have passed it by.

### A NORDIC NATION

Much of this article has revolved around the link between the concepts of nature and nation. We have seen how the nature of the Nordic peoples came to be identified with physical nature in the Nordic countries. Today we tend to identify the nation with the nation state, and to think of it primarily in terms of a specific physical territory. But the nation and the State can have quite separate identities. Thus the peoples of Wales and Scotland tend to see themselves as constituting separate nations, though they are both united, with England, in a British state. The Nordic peoples virtually all live in independent states, whereas the peoples living in the different regions of Germany are united within one State federation. Yet the differences in language and culture between northern and southern Germany are in some respects greater than those between the Nordic states. We have, furthermore, seen that there was a time when people in parts of northern Germany identified themselves as Nordic and people within Scandinavia had a less clearly defined national identity than that which we associate with the Nordic states today.

One might conclude, then, that the nation is to a certain extent a subjective state of mind related to cultural identity. It is the people of the nation with whom we identify, and with whom we feel a certain inborn familial relationship, even if that relation is one of adoption. Seen in this way, the Nordic area might be defined as a nation. It is also a nation which is capable of absorbing a diversity of languages and cultures, ranging from the Finnish in the north-east, to the German to the South. It is a nation which, in the eighteenth century, was even seen to include the Highlands of Scotland. One of the characteristics of this Nordic nation is that it is defined, to a certain extent, by its peripheral relationship to a European core. There is then a sense in which the nature of the Nordic nations must be seen in the context of a larger European identity.

The first great epic to be written in the shadow of the Homeric epics, which helped create a unifying Greek national identity within a multitude of city states, was Virgil's *Aeneid*. The *Aeneid*, in turn, played a vital role in defining a Roman national identity which was capable of encompassing a huge geographical area and a variety of cultures. In the *Aeneid* national identity is defined mytho-poetically. Roman origins are traced from ancient sources, such as the "natural" pastoral Arcadians from the periphery of Greek civilization, to Troy, and finally to Rome itself. It is an "invented" identity, linking together the ideal mythical qualities, identified with various places, which Virgil wanted to make part of the Roman nation. The religion and culture of Rome, in turn, defined what was to become Western Europe. The epics, such as that of Ossian or Frithiof, identified with the "Gothic" northern margins of Europe were likewise, along with the *Kalevala*, more or less mythopoetic creations, which served to define the identity of a new Europe focused on the Atlantic and Baltic.

There is, then, a real sense in which Europe itself constitutes a nation with a long history. It is the character of this European "nation" which is increasingly becoming an object of interest because of the breaking down of state boundaries which characterizes not only the Common Market, but also Eastern Europe. The Nordic nations have always played a vital role in defining the "nature" of this European nation. It is a role, however, which has defined the northern margins in opposition to the European core. It has provided an "other" in which Europe could mirror and define itself. The North is thus an inextricable part of the European identity, and it will remain so whether or not it becomes part of the new quasi-State, the European Community. It is the nature of the Nordic nations to be geographically on the margin, but spiritually at the core, of the European identity. The nature of Europe is in the North.