

## The Fairytaleworld of Gerhard Munthe

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We are going to a country where the fairytales are still alive behind the oil-platforms in the deep fiords, and where art nouveau flourished in Ålesund on the West Coast of Norway,- but also in the capital Christiania, now called Oslo. In Norway the demand for freedom was just as strong as here in Slovenia during the 19th.century, and the fairytales and folksongs *Norske Huldereventyr og Folkesagn* were collected by Peter Christian Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe and published in 1845-47. We have also preserved the ancient stories and litterature in Snorre Sturlasøn's *Kongesagaer* (Kings Sagas) written down around 1220-30, and republished with a cover and vignettes by Gerhard Munthe in 1897. This national movement coincided with that of the art nouveau movement in Norway and contributed to the dissolution of the union with Sweden in 1905.

A few year later in 1909 Gerhard Munthe said: "When we talk about our times, it could be called a time of individualism in the arts, it might be described as a period that is free of serfdom, a time that has shrugged off the shackles of a previous uniformity. There are those that shake their heads at all this freedom", 1. These words might be taken from an art debate of today, and strangely enough, the arts a 100 years ago in the period of art nouveau, had many things in common with our own times in terms of the quest for individualism, freedom and the current hybridization of different art forms. The move away from naturalism towards the more stylized decorative arts was seen as a "universal requirement". The decorative arts were regarded as an antithesis to the "reality" of naturalism. They were seen as fantasy arts, based upon line, rhythm and surface. The decorative arts were seen as a total art form, combining visual art, decorative art, craft and design.

Gerhard Munthe (1849-1929) - the cosmopolitan, painter and designer - was one of Norway's most international artists. At first he was a leading figure of the aesthetic movement of the 18880s, late rto develop into the art nouveau movement around 1900.. The Aesthetic movement as it was called in England and the USA, was based upon the aesthetic ideals of the 1870's and 1880's – a

cult that promoted beauty and the art of Japan. Beauty and "beauty for beauty's own sake" was regarded as a vital energy source that surpassed all religious, historical and geographical boundaries. In England, such artists as James McNeill Whistler, Edward Godwin

Gerhard Munthe, *Rythmisk Kunst*, Christiania Kunstforening Udstilling (Rhythmic Art Exhibition), Feb. 1909, p. 21. Andreas Aubert, *Norges Malerkunst* (Norwegian Painting), Christiania 1900, page 4 and Oscar Wilde stressed the need for beauty in everyday life. In France, Eugène Grasset and Charles Baudelaire were the foremost representatives of these ideas. They were inspired by the Middle Ages and above all else, Japan – a country that had opened its doors to the rest of the world in 1853. They wanted to introduce beauty and art into every home. They argued that good taste and interior design would lead to a better life for all. 3. This Aesthetic Movement was the basis for the development of such ideas in the Nordic countries long before William Morris' "Arts and Crafts" ideas were published and became known in the late 1880's and 90's.

The Norwegain professor of art history, Lorentz Dietrichson had launched a similar programme for "beauty in the home" as early as the 1870's. 4 When he returned home to Norway from Stockholm in 1876 and established Kunstindustrimuseet (The Museum of Decorative Arts) in Christiania, these thoughts were already in place. The Swedish pioneer of reform, Ellen Key, was very aware of aestheticism, and of Dietrichson's ideas and in 1897 she wrote an article about "beauty in the home" 5. In 1899 she published a book entitled *Skönhet för Alla (Beauty for Everyone)*, and three years later this was translated into Norwegian by Karen Grude Koth and was called *Gjer Heimen din Fager (Make your Home Beautiful)*. In 1899 Carl Larsson published his book *Ett Hem (A Home)* about his own house — Lilla Hyttnäs. His book promoted similar ideas. In Denmark, the movement was called "skönvirke" (the beauty movement) and it was encouraged by artists and designers such as Thorvald Bindesbøll and Georg Jensen.

It is in this context that we should look at Gerhard Munthe's work. We know that he admired and corresponded with Carl Larsson, and in 1895 he declared that he

would like to be compared to the French artist and designer Eugène Grasset and the Danish artist and designer Thorvald Bindesbøll. 6.

- 2 Elisabeth Aslin, *The Aesthetic Movement, prelude to Art Nouveau*, London, 1969.
- 3 Bo Grandien, Rõndruvans Glõd, Uddevalla, 1987, p. 311.
- 4 Iduns julehefte (Christmas publication) 1897.
- 5 Gerhard Munthe, Brudstykker (Fragments), "Min Vandring paa den dekorative Vei, af et brev 22. April 1895" Christiania, n.d.

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Munthe's earlier work as a painter was influenced by naturalism, but from the mid 1880's, more abstract and stylised elements appear in his art. This change was certainly due to his increasing interest in Japanese art, with which he became acquainted around 1886. That summer he joined the art colony at Fleskum, by Dælivannet (Dæli Lake) in Bærum, south of Oslo. Several researchers have pointed out that many of the participants were inspired by Japanese art, amongst them Gerhard Munthe. 7. During Christmas 1890, Munthe received a book about Japanese art from his Danish colleague, Bernt Grønvold. This was probably Madsen's book entitled Japansk Malerkunst (Japanese Painting), published in 1885. In a letter of thanks to Grønvold, Munthe wrote:" You could not have found anything I would have appreciated more. Neither was I aware of this aspect of Japanese art" 8. Some years later, Munthe wrote about "the movement that from Japan spreads across Europe now", and that Japanese art had been one of the main sources of inspiration for him in his endeavours to revitalize the decorative arts in Norway. 9 Above all, it was the regard to composition, but also the emphasis on the feudal and the national in Japanese art that fascinated Munthe.

It is clear that Munthe, just like the members of the Aesthetic Movement in England and in France, found a source of inspiration in myths and folktales, combined with impulses from Medieval and Japanese art and it was this movement which formed the baisi if the subsequent art nouveau. During the winter of 1891-91, a dramatic change occurred with regard to Munthe's artistic endeavours. He started thinking about industry, he said. He was struck by the fact that as far back as anyone could

remember, nobody had produced a Norwegian idea or pattern that might be used for carpets, wallpaper or porcelain in Norway. 10.

- 6 Marit Werenskiold, "Fleskum-kolonien (The Fleskum Colony) 1886 og den norske sommernatt", *Kunst og Kultur* 1988, p. 22-30.
- 7 Letter from Munthe to Grønvold 12.1.1891. Letter Collection nr. 90. National Library, Oslo.
- 8 Gerhard Munthe's notebook from around 1895, Munthe Archive, National Library, Oslo, Ms 1058.
- Letter from Munthe to Andreas Aubert, 17.12.1891, Letter Collection nr.32, National Library Oslo. "Gerhard Munthe 'and the movement that from Japan is moving across Europe now", Scandinavian Journal of Design History, Vol. IV, 1994 pp.27-47. Widar Halén, "Gerhard Munthe og 'den bevegelse som fra japan går over Europa nu'", Tradisjon og Fornyelse, Oslo, 1995, pages 77-92.

Some years later Munthe launched the idea of a "Norwegian-national colour palette": bright red, reddish violet, indigo blue, bluish green and strong yellow. These were all colours that related to Norwegian nature and the colours used in old, Norwegian folk art. 11. With this colour theory and with motifs taken from Norwegian sagas and folktales, Medieval tapestries and woodcarvings and from local flora and fauna, Munthe launched a Norwegian aesthetic movement which preceded that of art nouveau. In a time characterized by strong national hope regarding the dissolution of the union with Sweden, his ideas were well received in the artistic milieu.

The years between 1890 and 1893 were undoubtedly amongst Munthe's most productive. The motifs seemed to flow as from an inexhaustible source, and there is no doubt that the inspiration he gained from Japanese art had a liberating effect. In May-June 1892 Munthe travelled to Paris to engage in further studies. Whilst in Paris he visited Samuel Bing's shop and bought Japanese ceramics to a value of 42 FF. 12. Samuel Bing opened his La Maison de l'Art Nouveau shop in 1895. He sold contemporary decorative art and craft along with Japanese work – and "art nouveau" became a term that Munthe was certainly aware of.

Munthe's really important "decorative breakthrough" came with the Black and White Exhibition in Christiania (now Oslo) in 1893. He exhibited eleven "fantasies based on Norwegian folktales" at the exhibition. They had titles like *Blodtårnet* – *The Tower of Blood* (1891-92), *Trollebotn* – *Land of the Trolls* (1892), and *Beilere* 

- The Suitors (also known as Nordlysdøtrene - Daughters of Aurora Borealis)
(1892) (fig. 1). In a preview of the exhibition, the newspaper Morgenbladet had
already declared that these works heralded the future of ornamental art 13, and they
were received just as enthusiastically at exhibitions in Paris and Chicago (1893),

- Gerhard Munthe, *Brudstykker* (Fragments), "Lidt om Farvetradisjonen i Norge" 14.11.1895, "Om norsknationalt Farvevalg (Feb. 1896), Christiania, n.d.
- 11 Gerhard Munthe's notebook 1892-1908, Munthe Archive, National Library Oslo, Ms 1071 B.
- 12 *Morgenbladet*, 29.1.1893.

Stockholm (1894), Berlin (1896) and St. Petersburg (1897). These watercolour images were first transformed into tapestries by Munthes's wife, Sigrun from 1891-94. Later the work was carried out at the weaving studio that Jens Thiis established at the Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum – The Museum of Decorative Arts in Trondheim, in 1898.

Jens Thiis, who was a student in 1893, has best described the effect Munthe's watercolours had on the public: "Were these weaving patterns? Or what kind of art were they supposed to be? At that time we were quite young and had begun to experience naturalism as a dogma – it was like a straight jacket that compressed the imagination – we longed for the kind of art that broke loose from the narrow confines of the easel. For us, Munthe's work was a kind of redemption – a liberation" 14. Thiis also admired Japanese art, and he immediately recognized the way in which this influenced Munthe. He believed that Munthe displayed the same feeling for line and colour that the Japanese had.15.

Munthe himself said that the inspiration for the socalled *Fairytale Moods* came from three sources: old, Norwegian patterns and woven textiles, a child-like imagination, and the ancient stories that came before folktales; "A fine time, when Trolls were never stupid in a good-hearted way – they were cunning Jotuns in a time where all was blood and iron and far more terrible". 16.

The Fairytale Moods were particularly well received in Stockholm in 1894. It was probably Munthe's pupil and good friend Prince Eugene who persuaded him to exhibit. The preview the Prince wrote for the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* in which he described Munthe as possessing "unusual talent and fantasy" certainly contributed to the overwhelming reception the work received. 17. The well known

- Jens Thiis, Gerhard Munthe en studie, Trondhjem, 1903, p. 28
- 14 Op. Cit. p. 19.
- 15 Gerhard Munthe, *Brudstykker* (Fragments) "Min Vandring paa den dekorative Vei af et brev 22. Apil 1895", Christiania, n.d.
- 16 Dagens Nyheter, 17.1.1894.

Professor of Aesthetics, Karl Johan Warburg, was just as enthusiastic in his review. He said that as soon as one allowed oneself to come under the fairytale spell one was reminded of Oscar Wilde's vision for the future of art: "The fairytale must return to the country with its miraculous mood. The whole world shall change shape before our astounded eyes... Dragons shall roam in desolate places and the bird Phoenix shall soar in the heavens from its nest of fire. We shall lay our hands on the basilisk and see the jewel in the toad's eye. Chewing golden oats, hippogriffs shall rest in our stables and the bluebird soar over our heads, singing of beautiful and impossible things that are wonderful and never known, of fates that will not come about, even though they should" 18.

Aftenposten's (Norwegian daily newspaper) was not as positive, and asked whether such things could be called art – provocative, sinister and sometimes comical fantasies? 19. In a later review *Aftenposten's* critic stated that Munthe intended using these images to make polychrome reliefs, and hoped there were "men of means" who had the wherewithal to realise them. 20.

At least one well to do Norwegian took the hint. Consul Axel Heiberg secured a project for Munthe – incorporating some of his *Fairytale Moods* into a complete interior decoration – *Eventyrværelset* – *The Fairytale Room* for Holmenkollen Tourist Hotel in Oslo. 21. On 13<sup>th</sup> October 1896 Munthe wrote to Andreas Aubert

telling him he had secured work for the winter "which I shall spend between working on *Snorre* and *The Folktale Room*" 22. On 13<sup>th</sup> February he wrote again to Aubert telling him that he was working hard on *The Fairytale Room*. 23. The work was finished in the Spring of 1897 and it may be regarded as the first art nouveau interior in Norway. 24.

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17 Göteborgs Handels och Sjöfartstidning, 19.2.1894.
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- 18 Aftenposten, 5.2.1894.
- 19 Aftenposten, 11.2.1894.
- 20 Verdens Gang, 16.10.1899.
- 21 Letter Collection no. 32, National Library, Oslo.
- 22 Letter Collection no. 32, National Library, Oslo.
- 23 Gerhard Munthe Archive, Notebook 1 Work Sold, National Library, Oslo, Ms. 1061.

The 43 year old Munthe now made his breakthrough at last. Two major commissions place him firmly in the Norwegian art history books: the bookbinding, illustrations, vignettes and borders for *Snorre Sturlasøn's Kongesagaer*, published by J.M. Stenersen in Christiania in 1899 – and the room decoration – *The Fairytale Room* – for Holmenkollen Tourist Hotel, 1896-97 (fig. 2).

The interest in interior decoration was a natural part of the aesthetic and decorative movement. The complete interiors that Edward Godwin, James M. Whistler, Christopher Dresser and William Morris created in their own homes during the 1860's and 1870's, were often characterized by the use of Japanese objects and aesthetics, especially in the choice of paler colours and the combination of yellow and green that was popularly called "the greenery-yallery movement" 25. Another strong influence was Richard Wagner's idea of the "Gesamtkunstverk", a synthesis of all existing artforms, that he launched in connection with the building of the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth in 1867.

Carl Larsson had already been inspired by these ideas when he created his home at Lilla Hyttnäs in Sunborn, Sweden in 1889. In the Nordic countries, his home became inspirational. The same might be said of Munthe's house – Leveld in Lysaker, just outside Oslo, which he furnished towards the end of

the 1890's. The entrance hall and living room had just the right combination of green and yellow to make a strong statement. In May 1898, Erik Werenskiold wrote to Bernt Grønvold that Munthe's house "was lovely – it glows with colour - almost too much" 26. In his own home, Munthe developed a relaxed interior style with simplified ornaments and furniture and Japanese ceramics on the chimney ledge (fig. 3).

The same yellow-green colour combination was used for the *Fairytale Room* in

- 24 Elisabeth Aslin, op. cit. and Widar Halèn, *Christopher Dresser A pioneer of Modern Design*, London, 1990.
- Tone Skedsmo, "Hos kunstnere, polarforskere og mesener", *Kunst og Kultur*, no. 3, 1982, p. 137.

Holmenkollen Tourist Hotel, designed by the architect Ole Sverre, 1895-97. Sverre had been an assistant to architect Holm Hansen Munthe, who designed the first Holmenkollen Tourist Hotel in "Dragon Style" in 1889-90. The hotel burnt down in 1895. The architecture of the new hotel was also characterized by the same "Dragon Style", but in the interiors and especially Munthe's *Fairytale Room*, a new form of art was apparent – the influence of art nouveau in Norway. Unfortunately, in 1914, this hotel also burnt down – and with it Munthe's *Folktale Room*.

Stephan Tschudi-Madsen has established the fact that this mixture of Dragon Style and Art Nouveau was one of Norway's most important contributions to the development of style in Europe. 27. This was beyond doubt the most genuine style that had developed in Norway since the Middle ages, and it is no accident that it coincided with the fight for a liberated Norway. 28. Art Nouveau also had strong elements of nationalism in different parts of Europe. Folk art and folktales were an important source of inspiration, as well as local flora and fauna. In literature, music and the visual arts, this revitalization of folk traditions and aspects of nationalism had begun 50 years earlier. Now the time had come to revitalize architecture, the decorative arts and crafts. This development was not

typical for Norway, but it gathered momentum and intensity in countries that had complex double identities, like Austria/Hungary, Bosnia/Herzegovina, Czechoslovakia, Finland/Russia and Sweden/Norway. This trend was particularly apparent in the national pavilions at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1900. These countries all exhibited richly decorated rooms with visual imagery of national heroes and myths. This style was described by some as a fine mixture of tradition and modernity, whilst others referred to it as bizarre and absurd.

Munthe might well have been aware that these countries were trying to establish a modern, national style. As early as 1892, the Slovak, Dusan Samo Jurkovic

- 26 Stephan Tschudi-Madsen, Sources of Art Nouveau, Oslo, 1955, pp. 207-208.
- 27 Widar Halèn, *Drager, gullsmedkunst og drømmen om det nasjonale*, Oslo, 1992.

had already made a "Valassku" room with carved panels depicting liberal interpretations of old Slovakian ornaments and fairytales, and in 1895 he showed an entire village carved in the same style at the Czechoslovakian Ethnographic Exhibition in Prague. 29. During the 1890's, prominent Hungarian artists and architects such as Odön Lechner and József Rippl-Rónai endeavoured to transform folk art into a new national style that included elements of Art Nouveau. Amongst the first complete interiors were Odön Lechners's Museum of Decorative Arts (1893-96) and Rippl-Rónai's dining room, created for Count Tivadan Andrássy in Budapest (1896-99). The dining room had much in common with Munthe's work and the two artists might even have met each other in Paris, where Rippl-Rónai worked for Samuel Bing in the early 1890's. 30. A broad presentation of the new Hungarian style was shown at the famous Millenium Exhibition in Budapest in 1896 and Munthe may well have been aware of the exhibition as it received much attention from art magazines and other art publications. In 1898, he himself exhibited work at the big International Exhibition in Budapest. Another, lesser acknowledged source of inspiration may have been Gustav Klimt's decorations for Peles – the castle belonging to the Rumanian royal couple. In 1883 Klimt worked on frescoes depicting Rumanian fairytales and myths in a dream-like, decorative style – inspired by the Pre-Raphelites.31.

Munthe's friend, Prince Eugene, who was a nephew of Queen Elisabeth of Rumania, may have told him about these interiors.

In Munthe's Fairytale Room, inspiration from the emerging Art Nouveau style can clearly be seen, but the influence of the Aesthetic Movement, combined with abstract forms and colours inspired by Japanese art and Norwegian folk art were also apparent. There was a symbiosis of these elements that was meant to show

- 28 Christopher Long, "The Works of Our People": Dusan Jurkovic and the Slovak Folk Art Revival, *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, vol XII, New York, 2004, pp. 1-29.
- 29 Gyöngyi Éri and Zsuzsa Jobbágyi, *A Golden Age, art and society in Hungary 1896-1914*, Budapest, 1989, p. 99.
- Lucia Kurta, Painter and King: Gustav Klimt's Early decorative Work at Peles castle, Rumania, 1883-1884, Studies in the decorative Arts, vol XII, New York, 2004, pp. 98-125.

that Norway's place in the international world could not be disengaged from its national identity. Even though many people thought the room had a distinctly national character, Munthe himself believed that his style surpassed national boundaries, and that it expressed a youthful energy that launched a new style, a new art, art nouveau.

The Fairytale Room was not large – it measured only 812 cm. x 517 cm, but it must have been extraordinarily impressive. The entire room; ceiling, walls and doors were decorated with carvings and reliefs, made by the eminent woodcarver Johan Borgersen. In the middle of each of the long walls there were richly decorated doors and lintels, and one of the short walls there was a three panelled window. The door through which one entered from the hotel was much like The Door into the Mountain, as it appears in one of the Fairytale Moods images. It had carved, stylised door handles with sinuous, art nouveau curves (fig. 2). The door was framed by two characteristic poles with imaginary heads. They are reminiscent of ancient, Norwegian, pagan deities that archaeologists found at that time. Above the door was a plate with carved lettering: Nordon under fjöllo djupt under hello der leikar det. This is a refrain from an old Norwegian folksong called Liti Kersti 32. The door on the opposite side was more

characteristically French Art Nouveau in style, with a large, almost semi-circular window in the shape of a stylised owl with its wings out folded. This frontal composition depicting a bird was one of the art nouveau elements that was heavily influenced by Japanese art.

The Room was 2,8 metres high and was entirely covered with carved elements in two overlapping layers. The ceiling was framed and split into three parts by 28 cm wide wooden moulding with diagonally carved lines that gave a zigzag effect – they were probably yellow with the lines picked out in black. Munthe's drawing of the ceiling still exists, and it differs somewhat from the work that was actually

Magnus B. Landstad, *Norske Folkeviser* (Norwegian Folksongs), Christiania 1853, volume 1, page 437. Information supplied by mag. art. Åse Enerstvedt.

produced (fig. 4). He drew it as a single ceiling, but it was constructed in three parts. Munthe had also drawn a number of pear-like, red-coloured ornaments that were to be screwed into the ceiling moulding, but these were never made. The ceiling itself was completely covered by two overlapping ring patterns - an underlying pattern of large black rings (150 cm in diameter) and an outer layer with cogwheel-like rings in red (75 cm in diameter). In addition, Munthe had drawn a set of 8 open-work rosettes (34 cm in diameter) that were never made (fig.10). The complicated, overlapping pattern of the ceiling had much in common with the Japanese roofs that were so admired in Europe at that time. 33. The walls were divided into richly carved dados that were 130 cm high. The heavy, stylised play of lines and curves is reminiscent of the borders Munthe drew to illustrate Snorre's Kongesagaer, but there is also something of Thorvald Bindesbøll's sensual and expressive art nouveau ornamentation about it. A 20 cm wide, continuous frieze was mounted along the upper part of the room. This had a kind of yellow star pattern which was also used to frame all the relief carvings.

One of the short walls was completely covered by pictorial carvings and the inscription *Bjerget det Blaa – The Blue Mountain* (fig. 5). We see a princess with

a crown in a boat. She is being rowed across the fiord by four small trolls – towards the mountain where a stylised swan is waiting. On each side of "the Norwegian door" we see *Døren i Fjeldet -The Door into the Mountain* (also known as *La Porte de la Princess*,1894) (fig. 6) and *Beileren – The Suitor* (fig. 7). The motifs used for *Bjerget det Blaa* and *Døren i Fjeldet* are probably taken from Munthe's favourite folksong: Åsmund Frægdagjævar. 34. In *Bjerget det Blaa*, which is a simplified version of *Trollebotn- Land of the Trolls* (1892), we see how the king's daughter, Ermelin, is taken into the mountain. We are in a world far removed in time – the prehistoric Troll era. The princess is scared stiff and stares at the rowing trolls in horror – these ferocious creatures have kidnapped her and are carrying her back to the land of the Trolls – into The Blue Mountain. In *Døren* 

- 32 Widar Halén, Christopher Dresser A pioneer of Modern Design, London, 1990, pp. 45 and 79
- Hilmar Bakken, op. cit. p. 84 and Magnus B. Landstad, *Norske Folkeviser* (Norwegian Folksongs),
  Christiania, 1853, song nr. 1. 10 panels "Åsmund Frægdagjævar" (1902-04) are in the National Museum,
  Oslo.

i Fjeldet, we see Åsmund Frægdagjævar, who has been commissioned by the King of Ireland to rescue his daughter. He has travelled far north to the land of the Trolls to find her and bring her back home. We see Åsmund riding into the mountain through an iron-bound door. The scene is very dramatic, because the knight's horse tramples upon both the dragon and the serpent that guard the entrance. Behind them a whole pack of female trolls lie in wait. Can the knight manage to rescue the princess from inside the mountain? The door is surrounded by large, stylised icicles that threaten to spear Åsmund, and the dresses of the female trolls are (just like those of the Daughters of the Northern Lights) carved as ornamental areas with marked contours.

Beileren - The Suitor was a smaller version of Beilerne (also known as Nordlysdøttrene, 1892), in which there were originally three princesses and three polar bears (fig. 1). In this version there is only one terrified princess and one polar bear. In all other respects, the motif is almost exactly the same as the watercolour and the tapestry, apart from the fact that the upper and lower borders have been removed. Munthe showed himself to be a symbolist in this

piece, using influences from many different sources. We see the polar bear in the still of the night, a transformed prince seeking a bride – but the daughter of the king that stands before him is no earthly princess. She is the daughter of the northern lights (Aurora Borealis), with flames of fire in her hair. No such scene has ever been depicted in a Norwegian folktale. 35

The motifs in *The Fairytale Room* were largely free interpretations of old sagas, folktales and folksongs. In terms of composition, there is also a liberal aspect that is closely related to Japanese composition. The choice of colour and composition are so striking that we can say with some certainty that Munthe must have looked at a series of eight books about Japanese textile art that were acquired by Kunstindustrimuseet's Library in 1892 (fig. 8). However, the most obvious

34 Hilmar Bakken, op.cit. p. 53.

influence is from the French Japanist and Pre-Art Nouveau artist, Eugène Grasset. In *Døren i Fjeldet*, particularly in the rider and the horse, as well as the stylised landscapes and contrasting patterns, we see clear parallels to the illustrations in Grasset's famous literary work *Histoire de Quatres Fils Aymon, très nobles et très Vaillans Chevaliers* from 1879-83 (fig. 9). *Beileren* also has several similarities to Grasset's later work *L'Harmonie de la Musique* from 1891-92. The same motifs – women, bears and wild animals appear here (fig. 10).

Munthe was strongly influence by Japanese art and through this, managed to distance himself from naturalism, creating an almost perspective-less art form with stylised, contrasting patterns and shapes outlined by heavy contours with an angular appearance. When Sergei Djaghilev arranged an exhibition of Nordic art in St Petersburg in 1897, he included several of Munthe's *Folktale Moods*, amongst them *Beilerne*, *Døren i Fjeldet* and some of the illustrations for *Snorre*. He also recognised Munthe's Japanese influence. 36

On each side of the window on the short wall, there were two landscape panels with two troll giantesses and stars. These were a smaller version of Munthe's *To Gygrer - Two Troll Giantesses*. The large owl-shaped window in French Art-Nouveau style and the door on the other long wall are flanked by two landscapes. Close to the window we can see an old castle. It is as if the Soria Moria castle itself lies hidden, illuminated by light from the owl-window, waiting for something wonderful or terrible to happen. The area to the right of this was in fact a re-worked version of Munthe's *Blodsporene – Blood Tracks*, and we can see the polar bear's bloody footprints leading from the castle. Once again the landscape is depicted with large, flat areas of colour with marked contours and the trees have swirling, art-nouveau lines that are reminiscent of Eugène Grasset's ornamentation from around this time. 37

- Marit Werenskiold, "Sergej Djaghilevs artikkel 'Moderne Skandinavisk Maleri' Modern Scandinavian Painting -1893, translated and commented upon", *Kunst og Kultur*, 1991, pp. 194-230.
- 36 Eugène Grasset, La Plante et ses applications Ornamentale, Paris, 1896.

The inspiration from Eugène Grasset is clear, but unfortunately we know of no such complete interiors that Grasset may have created. With its carved imagery and a general *horror vacui*, with regard to the decoration, Munthe's room might be compared with James M. Whistler's famous Peacock Room from 1876. The room was a tribute to Oscar Wilde's Bluebird. The peacock – the symbol par excellence of the Aesthetic movement, as well as being central to Japanese art – was certainly known to Munthe (fig 11). The original chairs made for *The Fairytale Room* were embellished with peacocks – triumphant, with outspread tail feathers and bowed head – just as Japanese artists loved to portray them, though in this case, the birds had fearsome, dragon-like heads. The lower part of the chairs and the triangular tables, were decorated with pronounced, asymmetric formations that might be compared to the chairs made at the same time by the Frenchman Emile Gallé, or the so-called Anglo-Japanese furniture from England (fig. 12).

The Fairytale Room should be regarded as the first Norwegian room in the art nouveau style. It was also a "Gesamtkunstwerk",- a complete room decoration, in which imaginary creatures, fairytale characters and decorative elements all combined to create a larger entity. It must have been like entering The Blue Mountain itself – like entering into the fairytale. It exuded a mystical, poetic atmosphere that has neither before nor since, been created in Norway. It is a tragedy that the room no longer exists, but nevertheless, it continues to remind us of "en Tid da Alt var Blod og Jern og meget fælere" (A time when everything was blood and iron, and far more terrible) as Munthe said. 38

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38 Op. cit. note 17.