

Aurorae Borealis Studia Classica

Vol. XII

Norsk Høifjeld
(1898 / 1911 / 1927)

written by Theodor Caspari
illustrated by Theodor Kittelsen
and others

digitized, with a biographical introduction and summary
of contents by Corinna Hoffmann, Lea Meissner,
and Per Pippin Aspaas

Aurorae Borealis Studia Classica ('Classic Studies of the Northern Lights') is [a series](#) of digitized books, with biographical introductions and summaries of contents, edited by Per Pippin Aspaas and published by [Septentrio Academic Publishing](#), University of Tromsø - The Arctic University of Norway (UiT). The books as such are already in the public domain; all further content is open-access except when stated otherwise.

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The twelfth volume in the series derives from an MA-level course in Scandinavian literature, 'Dem Polarlicht auf der Spur. Wissenschaftshistorische und kulturwissenschaftliche Erkundigungen', given by Marie-Theres Federhofer at Humboldt University in Berlin, 2019. Course participants wrote content summaries of selected texts as part of their exam, some of which were selected for the *Aurorae Borealis Studia Classica* series. The book covered in this volume, *Norsk Høifjeld* (Norwegian Highlands), is a classic in Norwegian cultural history. The aurora borealis appears on several occasions in the book, both in the text and in some of its illustrations. Since neither the book's author, Theodor Caspari, nor its main illustrator, Theodor Kittelsen, are well-known outside Norway, we have decided to present a detailed summary of the work as a whole. Thus the reader will not only find an analysis of the specific role ascribed to the aurora borealis but also ample information on literary and artistic aspects of the book from beginning to end.

I would like to thank Marie-Theres Federhofer for the idea of including works of fiction in the series and Kira Moss for pointing to the potential of *Norsk Høifjeld*. Assistance from the copyright clearance unit of the National Library and the digitisation team at UiT's University Library is gratefully acknowledged.

- The editor

Items digitized for this volume:

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THEODOR CASPARI

(1853–1948)

Biographical Introduction

by Lea Meissner

Carl Theodor Caspari was born in Christiania on 13 February 1853 and died in the same city (by then renamed Oslo) on 12 February 1948. His parents were Carl Paul Caspari, a German professor of theology, and Marie Caroline Amalie Constanze von Zezschwitz. In 1883, he married Catharina Magdalena Wahl. Caspari was born and raised in Christiania but considered himself “German-born”: Although his parents were fluent in Norwegian, they likely spoke German at home.

Caspari became one of the most nationally acclaimed poets of nature in Norway. His nationalistic feelings were linked to nature and the countryside, with particular emphasis on the high mountains and life in the mountain villages. In his works, nature was often endowed with a sublime, profound meaning, with symbolic qualities attributed to natural phenomena such as the aurora borealis. Caspari was a deeply conservative man who used much of his poetic ability to side with tradition against the prevailing tendencies of the time. His conservatism included concern for protection of the wilderness; the programmatic poem ‘Staa vakt om naturen!’ (Protect Nature!, 1924) is often cited by contemporary environmentalists.

According to Tom Lotherington, it was the poetry of another Norwegian – namely, Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) – that opened Caspari’s eyes to the Norwegian mountain landscape. Especially Ibsen’s play *Brand* (1866) and the epic poem ‘Paa Vidderne’ (In the Mountain Wilderness, 1860/1871) had a profound impact on Caspari, who became an avid hiker and skier.

After receiving his theological diploma in 1877 and embarking on research trips to Germany and Italy, Caspari worked as a private tutor and taught at a private school, before settling in far-northern Tromsø in 1881 to teach in a gymnasium. After several years there, he briefly taught at a gymnasium in Kristiansund, before returning to Christiania in 1890 to become a senior teacher (*overlærer*) at the cathedral school. He remained in this post until his retirement in 1923.



Alongside his main profession as a teacher, Caspari was also a productive author. Having published regularly since his first book debuted in 1880, he took active part in The Norwegian Writers' Association (Den norske Forfatterforening) from its foundation in 1893. He wrote and published numerous poems, songs, novels, essays, and travel stories – the latter based on his frequent domestic and European journeys. Moreover, Caspari was a regular contributor to *Aftenposten*, one of Norway's most influential newspapers. The 'German' author's last book came out in 1942, only to be immediately banned by the occupying power. He died of a long-term illness in February 1948, the day before his ninety-fifth birthday.

Many of his publications enjoyed great popularity, among them *Norsk Høifjeld* (Norwegian Highlands), which was issued in a total of five editions between 1898 and 1927. Printed in large format with high-quality paper and costly illustrations by acclaimed artists, the series of editions of *Norsk Høifjeld* are among Caspari's most ambitious works.

Sources

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Portrait of Theodor Caspari. Photographer: L. Forbech
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THEODOR KITTELSEN'S ILLUSTRATIONS

by Corinna Hoffmann

A central element of *Norsk Høifjeld*, besides Caspari's prose and poetry, are the many illustrations accompanying the text. Some of these were contributed by Karl Uchermann (1855–1940), known for his highland panoramas; Andreas Bloch (1860–1917), who mainly produced flower and animal vignettes; the landscape painter Thorolf Holmboe (1866–1935); and Eivind Nielsen (1864–1939), whose portrayals of highland forests give further depth to the naturalistic aspects of Caspari's work. In addition to these illustrations, various editions of the work also include reproductions of photographs of contemporary mountaineers such as Jo Gjende (see, for example, the 4th ed., p. 95). However, most of the illustrations in *Norsk Høifjeld* – between ten and twenty-three, depending on the edition – were by the acclaimed Norwegian artist Theodor Severin Kittelsen (1857–1914).

Famous for his naturalistic portrayal of Norwegian landscapes, Kittelsen grew up in difficult social and economic circumstances. After his father passed away, the family sank into poverty. Although Kittelsen was drawn to the art of painting and illustrating from an early age, his family's precarious financial situation precluded him from pursuing any form of art education. In order to make a living, Kittelsen decided instead to work as a clockmaker, first in Christiania (today Oslo) and later in Arendal. Kittelsen's life eventually changed when the ship owner and patron of the arts Diderich Maria Aall (1842–1889) discovered his artistic talent and offered him financial support. Thanks to Aall, he was able to attend classes at the art school of Wilhelm von Hanno (1826–1882) and the Royal College of Art in 1874.

Between 1876 and 1882, Kittelsen spent some time in Munich and Paris, arguably the most influential artistic centres at that time. During his time in Munich, he met the Norwegian author Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) with whom he would later collaborate. Despite spending a significant amount of time in those cities, he was always drawn back to Norway, where he was eventually able to explore his unique style and find his voice as an artist. His encounters with the arctic Lofoten Archipelago, and the myths surrounding it, significantly influenced his work. The region is known for its beautiful mountainous scenery and its displays of northern lights – the latter a particular source of inspiration for Kittelsen. He began to depict marine and forest

trolls as well as mermaids, which became some of his best-known pictures. Illustrations combining nature and myth comprise most of his work, which includes: fairy tale illustrations for a series of children's books by Peter Christen Asbjørnsen entitled *Eventyrbog for Børn. Norske Folkeeventyr* (Fairy Tale Book for Children: Norwegian Folktales, 1883-87); ink drawings for the Homer parody *Batrachomyomachia* (The Battle of Frogs and Mice, 1885); *Trolldskap* (Trolls in Action, 1892); *Har dyrene Sjæl?* (Do Animals Have Souls? 1893); and *Svartedauen* (The Black Death, 1900).

Kittelsen remains a central figure in Norwegian art history and epitomizes the epoch of Norwegian naturalism in particular. The largest and most popular collection of his illustrations can be seen in Oslo's National Gallery (Nasjonalgalleriet).

As for his collaboration with Caspari, besides *Norsk Høifjeld*, Kittelsen illustrated two more of Caspari's books: *Digte af Per Gynt* (Poems by Peer Gynt, 1891) and *Vintereventyr* (Winter Fairy Tales, 1901). Although the aurora borealis is mentioned once in *Digte af Per Gynt*, it is only *Norsk Høifjeld* and *Vintereventyr* that includes illustrations of the phenomenon. Among the ten original illustrations by Kittelsen in the first edition of *Norsk Høifjeld* (1898), there are two that depict the aurora borealis. A third illustration, originally published in *Vintereventyr* (1901), was included in later editions of *Norsk Høifjeld*. The three illustrations are reproduced here. Further analysis of these illustrations can be found in the 'Interpretation and Summary of Contents' below.

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Caspari, Theodor. *Vintereventyr*. Med illustrationer af Th. Kittelsen. Kristiania 1901



«DÆK SKOGEN!»

Kittelsen's aurora borealis, example 1: 'Cover the forest!'
From *Norsk Høifjeld* 1st ed., p. 13; 4th ed., p. 5; 5th ed., p. 8.



«DA REISER HAN SIG OG TÆNDER NORDLYSET.»

Kittelsen's aurora borealis, example 2: 'Then he rises and lights the northern light'
From *Norsk Høifjeld* 1st ed., p. 17; 4th ed., p. 9; 5th ed., p. 11.



Kittelsen's aurora borealis, example 3

This illustration, originally published in the collection *Vintereventyr*, shows the 'Vinterdrot' (King Winter), sitting on his throne with a crown of northern lights encircling his head ('Nordlyskronen om sin Pande', as Caspari's text explains, in *Vintereventyr*, 1901, p. 44). It was included in later editions of *Norsk Høifjeld* (e.g. 4th ed., p. 128; 5th ed., p. 140).

NORSK HØIFJELD

Interpretation and Summary of Contents

by Corinna Hoffmann, Lea Meissner,
and Per Pippin Aspås

Norsk Høifjeld (Norwegian Highlands) is a collection of both prose and poetry, accompanied by a variety of illustrations and photographs portraying the natural landscape and inhabitants of the highlands. Caspari often goes into great detail concerning nature, describing all sorts of birds and tree species. In this regard, he shows some similarities to the French author Jules Verne (1828–1905), whose novels were widely read at the time.

The book *Norsk Høifjeld* was first published in 1898. It became an instant success, with altogether five editions issued during Caspari's lifetime. The selection and distribution of texts, and their accompanying illustrations, were slightly altered between the various editions. The editions are as follows:

1st ed.: *Norsk Høifjeld: Stemninger og skildringer*. Kristiania 1898. 176 pp. (With numerous illustrations, including ten by Theodor Kittelsen)

2nd ed.: *Norsk Høifjeld: Stemninger og skildringer*. Kristiania 1907. 136 pp. (With numerous illustrations, including twenty by Theodor Kittelsen)

3rd ed.: *Norsk Høifjeld: Stemninger og skildringer*. Kristiania 1907. 136 pp. (With numerous illustrations, including twenty by Theodor Kittelsen)

4th ed.: *Norsk Høifjeld: Stemninger og Skildringer*. Kristiania 1911. 136 pp. (With numerous illustrations, including twenty by Theodor Kittelsen)

5th ed.: *Høifjeld og fjeldfolk: Norsk høifjeld, Vintereventyr, Vildren*. Oslo 1927. 151+161 pp. (With numerous illustrations, including twenty-three by Theodor Kittelsen)

In this edition of *Aurorae Borealis Classica*, only the first, fourth, and fifth editions have been included. In addition, a copy of the second edition has been consulted, which appears to be identical to the fourth edition. The main parts of the four books are shown in the table below. The aurora borealis figures in *Præludium*, *Vinterliv*, and *Nordland* as well as *Vintereventyr*.



1st ed.	<i>dedication</i>	HØIFJELD I Præludium II Opper mod Høifjeldet III Vidden IV Det Dødes Rige V Høifjeldstyper VI Høst paa Høifjeldet	NORDLAND †	
2nd ed.	<i>dedication</i>	Præludium Opper mod Høifjeldet Vidden Det Dødes Rige Høifjeldstyper Høst paa Høifjeldet Vinterliv *		
4th ed.	<i>dedication</i>	Præludium Opper mod Høifjeldet Vidden Det dødes Rige Høifjeldstyper Høst paa Høifjeldet Vinterliv *		
5th ed.		NORSK HØIFJELD Præludium Opper mot høifjeldet Vidden Det dødes rike Fjeldmennesker Høst paa høifjeldet	VINTEREVENTYR	VILDREN Første bok Anden bok

† **NORDLAND** was dropped as a separate section in all later editions.

* **Vinterliv**, the last part of the 2nd and 4th eds., consists mainly of extracts from *Vinter-eventyr*, a collection of texts first published in 1901 and reissued in the 5th ed.

[Dedication] Til Johan Sebastian Welhavens Minde (1st ed., 1-5; 4th ed., (vii)-(viii); *missing in 5th ed.*)

The book opens with a poem dedicated to the memory of Norwegian poet Johan Sebastian Welhaven (1807-1873). The poem essentially portrays Norway's nature and praises the country's wide forests and many lakes. It also describes a more mystical aspect of Norwegian nature, represented by elves and midsummer's day, as well as imagining the forest as a living being with a beating heart. This tendency permeates the book as a whole.

Certain phrases like the word 'Fædreland' (Fatherland) in combination with the nature described, gives the poem a national Romantic dimension – another aspect that can be observed throughout the book. This suggests that the notion of national sentiment in Norway – still a rather young nation at that time – was strongly connected to its natural landscape. This seamlessly fits into the broader current of national Romanticism during the nineteenth century.

HØIFJELD (1st ed.; *section name missing in later editions*)

I. PRÆLUDIUM (1st ed., 11-22; 4th ed., 1-13; 5th ed., 3-13)

The *Prælidium* (Prelude) is one of several chapters illustrated by Theodor Kittelsen that explicitly mentions the northern lights and describes them in detail. The chapter begins, however, with an illustration by Karl Uchermann that portrays a snowy owl (*Bubo scandiacus*) with its wings spread, about to take off from a rock. We see a mountain and some greenery in the background.

Like most of the book, the prelude combines prose and poetry (often in the form of song lyrics). The chapter starts off with a short verse, introducing the reader to the Norwegian landscape, featuring its highest points as seen from an owl's perspective as well as the lowest regions of the marsh.

The first part of the prose provides a glimpse into the vastness and greatness of the Norwegian highlands, which dwarf anything humankind has created. It highlights the ever-changing nature of these regions, its diversity of life and the colourfulness – particularly the brown and black features of the mountain, the white of the glaciers, as well as the blue of the sky.

Furthermore, this part reiterates the constant and eternal circle of life and death, which represent the two key elements or forces of the Norwegian highlands. Caspari compares this duality of life and death – light and darkness, day and night – to two significant musical compositions: The *Scherzo* – as light and joyous as the day – and the *Nocturne*, representing the heaviness and melancholy of the night.

The prologue also introduces the reader to a character that can be found throughout the book's prose as well as in many of Kittelsen's illustrations: the god or spirit of the highlands. This character is portrayed as an old man with white hair and a long beard, who wears long robes and always has an earnest expression on his face. In the first illustration depicting him, he stands in the middle of a blizzard, pointing in the same direction as the hail, seemingly commanding it. He appears as a ghostly figure with significant power over nature in the highlands, which adds a mystical and fantastic aspect to the story. The text describes the spirit of the highlands as being in charge of seasonal changes, summoning the cold and harsh winter to the land. Sitting on his seat high up in the mountains, he creates a great storm and commands the weather to freeze the lakes and cover the forest with masses of snow. When he decides to stop this mayhem, the sky clears up and it becomes quiet again. Next, the character raises his hands up to the starry sky and ignites the northern lights.

Caspari then describes this natural phenomenon in a short poem, highlighting how difficult it is to grasp, since it cannot be compared to any other natural light we know, like the sun or the stars. The aurora borealis appears as mystical, fluttering glimpses of lights that change colour, sparkle, and then perish again. It is described as such an extraordinary phenomenon that the artist who depicts it, namely the spirit of the highlands, has to be a poet, a painter, and a composer all at once.

The spirit of the highlands then descends from his seat at the top of the mountains and wanders through the land to see if everything is as it should be, the northern lights shining above his head like a crown.

Kittelsen's illustration accompanying this part of the text again shows the spirit of the highlands - the old man from before - creating these lights. He is reaching up to the sky and his hands almost seem to touch the northern lights, portrayed as bright, vertical stripes against the night sky.

While the northern lights are portrayed as a beautiful and extraordinary phenomenon, they do not seem to have any specific function within the story other than illuminating the sky. They do not necessarily move the plot forward, and while Kittelsen's illustration of the phenomenon supports its significance, it is simply another aspect of the Norwegian highlands like any other phenomenon of nature described by Caspari, such as the harsh wind of winter or the beauty of spring.

Caspari then goes into more detail and compares the winter nights in the highlands as well the northern lights to a great symphony:

Har du hørt Vinternattens Symfoni? - Krystallernes legende Æolsharper,
Nordlysets Giger og Ætherens Klarinetter, Høifjeldets Orgel i dæmpet Døn? - En Hymne

til Renheden, en Klarhedens Høisang, en *Andanta qvasi una Fantasia*, men løst ifra Sommernattens tungsind! – Kjender du Vinterdagens Scherzo? –

(Have you heard the symphony of the winter's night? – The playful harp of the crystals, the violins of the northern lights and the clarinets of the ether, the highland's organ in the gloomy dawn? – A hymn to purity, an anthem of clarity, an *Andanta qvasi una Fantasia* but released from the heaviness of a summer's night! – Do you know the winter day's scherzo? –)

As we can see, Caspari mentions the 'violins of the northern lights', the 'clarinets of the ether', and the 'the highland's organ'. He describes this symphony as clear and pure, something inherently different from the heavy summer nights, and compares it to Beethoven's famous Piano Sonata No. 13: *Quasi una fantasia* (popularly known as the Moonlight Sonata).

This description of the sound of the northern lights is particularly interesting since the notion of the aurora borealis emitting sound has long been part of research on the phenomenon and is still something scholars debate today (see [vol. VIII](#) of *Aurorae Borealis Studia Classica*).

In the prelude, Caspari also mentions that the seasons in the remote highlands differ from the seasons in the lowlands. While spring has already sprung down in the realm of the humans, the highlands remain a wintery region, untouched by spring. Finally, around May, when the spirit of the highlands is leaving, spring is allowed to begin, beginning with the rushing streams and fountains formed from melted snow and ice.

The last passage of the prologue once again describes the cold, hard, and rather dangerous nature of the highlands but also argues that its beauty is significant and unmatched. Caspari reiterates that there are also 'a thousand beautiful little things' that can be found up there – things to be seen and heard.

Jeg elsker dig (1st ed., 23–4; 4th ed., 14–5; 5th ed., 14)

'I love you' is essentially a love song addressed to nature – here portrayed as the personification of a woman. Throughout the verses, the lyrical self declares their love of nature as it changes throughout the seasons. From blossoming flowers in spring, through clover meadows and the warm sun in the summer, to the golden colours of autumn and the white snow in winter – the love of nature is always present.

Vinterdrømme (1st ed., 25–6; 4th ed., 123–4; 5th ed., 133–4)¹

'Winter Dreams' is a poem that tells the story of an elf walking alone one winter night along a dark stream through the frozen scrub. He whispers dreams to the bushes and slips between

¹ In the 4th edition, this poem is found in *Vinterliv*; in the 5th edition, it has been placed in the corresponding section *Vintereventyr*.

their dense branches. But now he is trapped and can only see the white snow, the blue sky, and his friends, the stars, above him. In order to escape, he must awaken the frozen scrub.

The poem is accompanied by a painting of a wintry landscape with a river lined with bushes and little trees. There is a bridge that leads over the river with more bushes and a forest in the background.

Aprilsnar (5th ed., 15–7; *missing in other editions*)

‘April’s Fools’ is a poem featuring a reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*), a grouse (*Lagopus lagopus* or *L. mutus*), a stream, and a bear (*Ursus arctos*) peeping out from its winter den. They all are fooled by an early – though fleeting – arrival of warmth in the middle of March. But it is not even April yet, as the bear grumpily realizes.

Og nu staar bjerken i brudeslør (5th ed., 18–9; *missing in other editions*)

‘And the Birch is Dressed as a Bride’: The birch (*Betula pubescens*) is dressed as a bride, with the starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) acting as toastmaster. Together they chase away all dark moods, allowing the poet to freely walk about in nature as they please.

Nu klær Vaaren sig paa (1st ed., 27–8; 4th ed., 16–7; *missing in 5th ed.*)

As the title ‘Spring is Getting Dressed’ suggests, the song’s main theme is spring. In four short verses, the lyrics describe the changes that accompany the shifting of seasons, like blossoming violets, budding trees, and birds building nests. Spring, too, appears as a woman in this poem, as the pronoun ‘hun’ (she) suggests.

Blaaveis (1st ed., 29; 4th ed., 18; 5th ed., *missing in 5th ed.*)

‘Liverleaf’ (*Hepatica nobilis*) is another short poem on the theme of spring. In two short verses, Caspari describes that liverleaf is the very first flower in spring, growing and blossoming when most of the land is still desolate and bleak.

Serenade (1st ed. 30–1; 4th ed., 19–20; 5th ed., 20–1)

‘Serenade’ is another poem in which the lyrical self shows their deep affection for the spring season. The four verses describe the beauty and joy of spring, the love of which exceeds the stars in the sky, the whisper of the forest, or the light of life.

II. OPOVER MOD HØIFJELDET

This section, Up toward the Highlands, is a narrative mixture of prose and poetry, followed by some loosely related poems.

Opbrud (1st ed., 35–8; 4th ed., 23–5; 5th ed., 25–7)

‘Departure’ focuses on the forest of the highland, specifically the old forest. It addresses the difficulties that especially young, small trees face when fighting for space and a glimpse of light. It also recounts a conversation between a river, the forest, and a variety of birds, as well as the beginning of the great hike through the forest, a recurring theme throughout this section. *Opbrud* specifically introduces a number of additional protagonists to the story, most notably, the birch and the song thrush (*Turdus philomelos*), as well as other birds and species of trees.

Ruskal og Raila (1st ed., 39–43; 4th ed., 26–30; *missing in 5th ed.*)

This part tells the story of the Ruskal and Raila rivers who promise to never part ways at the beginning of the story but lose each other when they reach a steep mountain cliff, drifting further and further apart. Ruskal travels deep into the darkness of the mountain. He eventually meets a birch up on a hillside, who shows him the way out of the mountain and into the light of day. Raila, too, has lost her way, and again the birch appears to offer help, eventually reuniting the two rivers.

Gran og Bjerk (1st ed., 44–8; 4th ed., 31–4; 5th ed., 28–32)

‘Spruce [*Picea abies*] and Birch’ continues with the hike through the forest, placing the birch and the spruce at the centre of events. The birch continuously cheers the forest on, telling everybody to keep moving. It eventually starts a conversation with the spruce, who doesn’t seem to join the hike, and they begin debating the forest’s inherent qualities.

While the birch mainly describes the forest’s more positive, pleasant, and beautiful aspects, the spruce challenges this view by stating, ‘that is your forest, not mine’. The spruce then tells of the forest’s uglier aspects: the mosses and dead trees as well as the violent winter storms. The birch then admits that it knows of these things. The spruce continues, talking about walking to the end of the world, to the pinnacle and toward the blue sky. It also talks of the dangers of the mountain like the cold snow and ice – which may serve as a warning to the birch or some sort of foreshadowing.

Although the birch considers this, it starts to cheer the rest of the forest on again while continuing its walk.

Furuskog (1st ed., 49–56; 4th ed., 35–40; 5th ed., 33–8)

‘Pine Forest’ (*Pinus silvestris*): The forest, including the pine tree, keeps on walking, eager to get up the mountain, moving as quickly as possible until it finds the perfect spot.

The beautiful and proud birch, however, does not yet have the courage it takes to go up the mountain where the winter storms are harsh. It eventually finds a nice mountain valley and calls the others to follow. However, among those who do come along are a number of small, ugly trees and bushes, and the birch begins to worry about the pine tree up on the mountain. It seeks the company of the pine trees in the valley, which begin growing into big, strong, and regal giants.

There, underneath these giants, the birch enjoys the sun, singing its song. But in the valley there is also a stream called Uranus, which has its source in the mountain itself. After heavy rainfalls, it roars down into the valley, its voice so deafening that it drowns out the birch's song. In the end, the birch realizes that in order to free itself from the noise of the stream and the shadow of the mountain, it must climb.

Ved Maalet (1st ed., 57-63; 4th ed., 41-6; 5th ed., 39-44)

'At the Destination' begins with another illustration by Theodor Kittelsen that shows trees stripped of their leaves and bowing under a strong wind.

The birch makes its way up, leaving the pine forest and the waterfall behind. The north wind is strong, but the birch keeps on going until it sees the first blue peaks and finally reaches the highlands bathed in the shining ether. After a while, the birch realizes that it is all alone and cries out in fear. The poplar (*Populus tremula*) and willow (*Salix*) respond, assuring the birch that they will follow it. But the proud birch declines their offer, saying that it does not need their company.

Soon, however, the sky turns dark and the winter storms arrive. The snow begins to rise higher and higher and the birch fights for its life. Just when it starts to lose all hope, the poplar and willow call out to it again, offering help. The birch survives the winter but is struck by horror at the reflection it sees in a lake. Once a graceful and proud tree, it is now crooked and crippled, little more than a shrub and not much higher than the poplar and willow. Its victory over winter has come at a cost, and sadness falls over the birch. It eventually finds a great pine tree and with the poplar and willow also around, it is no longer alone and feels content again.

Oppe endda! (5th ed., 45; *missing in other editions*)

In the poem 'Still Awake!' the author addresses the song thrush, urging him to rest for the night and leave the scene for nightjars (*Caprimulgus europaeus*) and bats (*Chiroptera*) to take over. In an accompanying illustration by Kittelsen, the full moon is seen hanging above mountainous scenery with scattered trees.

Skogsus (1st ed., 64–5; 4th ed., 47; 5th ed., 46)

‘The Rustle of the Forest’ is a three-verse poem that narrates the forest’s ‘speech’: the sounds the birch and spruce make in the wind. It is a sweet, deep, quiet hum that delights the lyrical self. This speech cannot be explained but is something that must be discovered and understood by each person individually.

Skogenes sjæl (5th ed., 47–8; *missing in other editions*)

‘The Soul of the Forests’ is a poem celebrating the forests’ timid soul, whom the poet envisages as a little bird constantly on guard, quick to escape whenever a human being approaches. When he finally manages to catch sight of her, making eye contact from a distance, ‘heienes tunge sind / og skogenes sære tanke, / de gled mig i sjælen ind’ (the heavy mood of the heaths, and the bizarre thought of the woods, came creeping into my soul).

Skogens kirkegaard (5th ed., 49–50; *missing in other editions*)

‘The Graveyard of the Forests’ is another poem dealing with the mysterious, elusive secrets of the woods. The poet wonders where the dead are hidden and asks the trees, wind, and flowers for help – only to learn that death is omnipresent. Wherever there is joy and laughter death is never far away.

To søstre (1st ed., 66–69; 4th ed., 48–50; *missing in 5th ed.*)

‘Two Sisters’ is accompanied by an illustration of Andreas Bloch showing a birch and a spruce in a wintry, snowy landscape. The poem tells the story of these trees, which represent ‘two sisters’.

Divided into three parts, the poem begins with the story of the birch, which blossoms with bright leaves and is happiest in spring. This happiness, along with its leaves, disappears come winter, and the birch dies with the first snow. The spruce however, survives through autumn and winter, maintaining its beautiful green colour. The last part of the poem unites both trees and their most beautiful features.

Høststemning (1st ed., 70–3; 4th ed., 52–4; *missing in 5th ed.*)

The poem ‘Autumn Mood’ returns to the elderly character the reader already met in the first part of the book: the spirit of the highlands. Set in autumn, it creates a fitting atmosphere by painting a picture of trees adorned with yellow and golden leaves. The spirit of the highlands then appears as a fisherman on a stream: a ghostly figure standing on moss. His face is furrowed with wrinkles and he looks sorrowful. Like a ghost, he eventually disappears again.

The illustration by Theodor Kittelsen accompanying the text once again shows the figure of the spirit of the highlands. Here he appears to be almost translucent, – like a ghost – standing on the shore, a fishing rod in his hand.

Skogens Kirkegaard (1st ed., 74–5; 4th ed., 55–6; 5th ed., 49–50)

‘The Churchyard of the Forest’ is a darker poem on the theme of death. In eight short verses, it asks where the forest hides its dead – a question neither the trees in the forest nor the flowers in the field seem to be able to answer. Finally, the wind leads the way, and the lyrical self discovers that wherever one goes, wherever one sets foot on the ground, one walks among the dead. It ends with the realization that wherever there is life, there is also death.

III. VIDDEN (1st ed., 77–89; 4th ed., 57–68; 5th ed., 53–61)

The Mountain Plain: This section returns to the birch, which is still making its way up the mountain. It starts off, however, by saying that trees cannot cross a certain height or altitude in the highlands and that the birch is no exception. Nevertheless, the birch refuses to give up; in order to reach the highlands, it crouches down and crawls, pondering all the transformations it went through to get there.

The second part of this section narrates the events on a midsummer’s night in the plain, when a lively conversation erupts between birds, insects, and a stream until the west wind arrives and silences them all again. In a short poem, the wind tells all the residents of the plain to go to sleep. Only the poplar and willow stay awake, quietly attempting to speak with the stream. But they receive no answer.

Suddenly, an icy draft cuts through the plain and everyone awakes in horror. The spirit of the highlands arrives again – the old fisherman – looking like a transparent shadow. But as quickly as he arrives, he leaves again.

The illustration by Theodor Kittelsen that concludes this section portrays this exact moment. We see the spirit of the highlands again: a haggard old man, as pale as a ghost. He holds a fish in one hand and a fishing rod in the other one.

Jeg slæbte min kvide til viddens vang (1st ed., 90; 4th ed., 69; 5th ed., 62)

‘I Dragged my Pain out to the Meadow on the Mountain Plain’: This song connects the nature of the highlands to sound and music, a theme Caspari returns to time and again in this work. In four verses, the lyrical self describes the song of the larch (*Alauda arvensis*), the humming of flowers, and the musical sound of the stream and wind, all of which helps one to overcome their sorrow.

The song ends with some advice to the reader: Everyone suffering from grief should ascend to the glaciers and mountain peaks. In short, they should walk into the wilderness in order to let go of their sorrow.

IV. DET DØDES RIGE (1st ed., 91–101; 4th ed., 71–7; 5th ed., 63–9)

In this section, The Realm of Death, Caspari introduces summer as the realm of death in the high mountains. The mountains are dark and only the glaciers remain white, but they are lifeless. Melancholy and the consciousness of death mingle with nature's life. Caspari addresses the reader in the second person, as if they were accompanying him as he walks through the landscape. And just as one arrives to the top of the mountain, the joy of life, and life itself, returns to the glacier, which is compared to an ocean. It moves nature and brings the first signs of winter with it. The wind also brings the sound of birds; the water between the cliffs is moving, though further away the 'ocean' of the glacier is calm. The longing for the 'ocean' pulls one deeper into the glacier – one of the marvels and adventures of nature in the mountains. The sky is reflected in this crystal-clear world. One stands in the middle of the realm of death and is surrounded by light and life.

These lyrical images are accompanied by an illustration of the landscape. It is a view between the high mountains, with only snow on the peaks and the sea in the distance. Caspari explains that the mountains are very old and have been there since the formation of earth; in fact, they have been there since the gods carved their runes into the stone. They are capable of being so still that it puts one into a trance, which feels like nirvana. But the stillness is disturbed by a bird – the rock ptarmigan (*Lagopus mutus*), a species that hunters and biologists have described as unintelligent because it has not sought out a more hospitable habitat. However, it is the master of this harsh landscape and knows how to live in and with it.

Fjeldtronningen (5th ed., 70–1; *missing in other editions*)

Subtitled *Ballade* (Ballad), 'The Mountain Queen' is a song that celebrates the elusive character of a queen who resides on the steepest part of the mountain. Her cavalier, the river, runs away from her, longingly looking back as he travels downstream. An accompanying photograph by Wilse suggests that the 'queen' in question is a *Saxifraga cotyledon* or Bergfrue (mountain madam in Norwegian).

Sommernat paa Bræen (1st ed., 102; 4th ed., 78; 5th ed., 72)

'Summer Night on the Glacier' is a short poem of three verses describing the beauty of the sleeping glacier. With a clear chest, its spirit sings like clarinets, sparkling stars, and sleeping field and fauna. It's so quiet that one can hear the gentle breath of the high mountains.

Gloria in Excelsis (1st ed., 103; 4th ed., 80; 5th ed., 73)

‘Glory in the Highest’: This two-verse poem is accompanied by an illustration by Theodor Kittelsen. It shows rocks in the snow and, off in the distance, birds flying from the mountains into the clear sky. The poem praises the snowflakes and their work in the mountains: fluttering in the air, silencing the world, or singing the mountain’s song.

V. HØIFJELDSTYPER (1st ed., 105-25; 4th ed., 81-96; 5th ed., 75-89)

In this chapter, essentially a typology of highland characters (*Høifjeldstyper*, or *Fjeldmennesker*, as they are called in the fifth edition), Caspari lets the reader gradually ascend to the high mountains. He places his various types of mountain people on the different levels of the mountain’s fauna.

The first type, Sjur Sande, or Sjugurd, is described as *Høifjellsbjørnen* (the highland bear). He has a farm and land in a lower region of the mountain and hosts the first tourists, but at the same time, he is a mountain man who forms part of the landscape for half the year. At the beginning of the text about him, an illustration by Theodor Kittelsen shows a mountain man with a long beard carrying firewood on his back next to a bear. There is also a picture of a man similar to the illustration with the caption ‘Høifjellsbjørnen’.

Another type is the *Tamrenen* (the tamed reindeer). He lives at the top of the mountain village and is a permanent mountain farmer but has left the operation of the farm to his wife and children. Instead, he has assumed the responsibility of hosting mountain tourists. In many ways, he is also a mountain man, and memories of hikes in the high mountains keep the spark of life lit in him during the long winter. But he is about to be tamed by culture, which is why he has a mark in his ear like a tamed animal. This part of the text features an illustration by Kittelsen that shows a man on a sledge laden with wood and hay being pulled up the mountain by a horse.

The opposite of *Tamrenen* is *Vildrenen* (the wild reindeer). He mostly lives above the tree line, has neither a wife nor child, does not cohabit well, is sceptical of tourists, and thrives when he can live alone. Supposedly, this figure is Jo Gjende (1794-1894), perhaps the most legendary Norwegian mountain man, a human being who lives entirely in harmony with nature. As a skilled hunter and fisherman, *Vildrenen* spends much of the year in solitude in the mountains. The illustrations accompanying this segment of the text vary between editions, captioned either *Vildren* (1st ed., p. 123) or *Jo Gjende* (4th ed., p. 95; 5th ed., p. 87).

Sjugur (5th ed., 90-4; *missing in other editions*)

‘Sjugur’ is a poem celebrating the highland bear introduced above, here described as an elderly, somewhat grumpy character who sits alone and philosophizes under the starry sky. The narrator

of the poem, named Per, is a reindeer hunter who admires the sight of Sjugur's solitary mountain cabin at night, when 'sneen røk og føk og gnistret, / nordlys viste vei til sjøen' (snow flew about like smoke, glittering in the wind / and northern lights showed the direction to the lake). The aurora borealis is thus a helping hand, its faint light part of the harsh but romantic natural scenery, mastered only by brave hunters and solitary wanderers accustomed to the mountain.

Per pays a visit to Sjugur, and they both criticize life down in the village. Sjugur in particular singles out the vicar and his talk of sin and holiness. Jehova, however, is quoted as having recommended life in the mountain. It is up here, Sjugur argues, that the presence of Jehova can really be felt and his voice heard and understood.

Per Spillemand (5th ed., 95-6; *missing in other editions*)

'Per the Fiddler' is a folk-song type of poem about an elderly fiddler longing for a drink. When his wish is fulfilled, he sings and becomes nostalgic. He sleeps at Gjende's place and neglects the goats he was supposed to herd.

Nils Vassenden og Sjøormen (5th ed., 97-100; *missing in other editions*)

'Nils Vassenden and the Serpent of the Lake' is a poem about a man named Nils Vassenden who is about to row his boat home from a party (Vassenden in Norwegian means 'the most remote shore of a lake'). He hopes his wife Anne is still at home, sound asleep. All of a sudden, the serpent of the lake appears; it is an imposing yet playful figure, judging from an illustration by Theodor Kittelsen. The two talk together for a while. The serpent makes some funny moves that make Nils laugh. Then Anne arrives in another rowboat, and the serpent excuses himself, as sunlight is approaching. Neither Nils nor Anne appears to be afraid of the monster at all.

VI. HØST PAA HØIFJELDET

Høst paa Høifjeldet (1st ed., 127-48; 4th ed., 99-115; 5th ed., 101-16)

'Autumn in the Highlands' is a seven-verse poem that introduces the reader to the next chapter and season of the year. There is an autumn feast and dance happening under the fading evening light and early full moon. Everything is coloured in red and gold, and the flowers celebrate and dance in the wind one last time before they die.

The poem is followed by a longer text in prose, but there is first an illustration by Karl Uchermann (found in all editions except for the fifth one) that shows hunters taking a road into the mountain forest. The observer knows they are hunters because they have weapons, a horse, and dogs with them. In this text, the reader finally meets the guests in the mountains: tourists, fishermen, and hunters. They are leaving the mountains because fall is moving in. But while

the tourists go to the mountains without any concrete motives and often return to the same spots, the latter are more embedded in nature, according to Caspari. They are guests of honour in the mountains. He emphasizes the hunters' and fishermen's intimate knowledge of the mountain flora and fauna and their interest in and familiarity with the life and mindset needed to survive in the mountains.

Later in the text, there is another illustration by Uchermann that shows a reindeer in the wild with snow-covered mountains in the background. Caspari also portrays some other mountain types with traits comparable to the wild reindeer, and he names some of them, for example the elderly hunter Jakob Rundhøgda or the fisherman Hans Gjæter, whom the reader can visualize thanks to an illustration by Kittelsen that shows the fisherman transporting firewood on his boat across a lake. They are rural people who move to the mountains as soon as the opportunity arises; they are no longer bound by the obligations at home on the farm. They go to the mountains without any actual tasks, or these are disguised as searching for food. It is the mountain farmers who most enjoy hunting and fishing and move to the highlands as soon as autumn arrives. These are the authentic highland people, who venture back into the mountains as soon as the tourists are gone. Later in the text, there is an illustration that shows a fisherman at the shore mending his nets. This illustration underlines the text about how Jakob tents his nets after fishing and prepares for the autumn feast. The last illustration of this chapter (missing in the fifth edition) is again by Uchermann and shows a reindeer on rocky terrain at the shore of a river with the snow-covered mountains in the background. This painting illustrates the reindeer's life before Jakob and other hunters ventured into the highlands to kill the animals. The last pages of this text visualize the autumn festivities and last rounds of hunting in the highlands, which mark the end of autumn and the beginning of winter with the arrival of snowflakes.

The text appears to be virtually identical in the first and fourth editions. In the fifth edition, however, it is completely revised. However, although several pages of new text are introduced, there remains the same romanticizing dichotomy between 'superficial tourists' and 'authentic mountain people'.

Gamle minder (5th ed., 117-9; *missing in other editions*)

'Old Memories' is a profoundly nostalgic poem about lost love. A pine tree on a hill sends the poet a vision of his loved one, so vivid that he nearly falls to his knees and talks to her. But alas, the vision disappears, only a heap of rotting pieces of timber remaining.

Fiskeren (5th ed., 120–2; *missing in other editions*)

‘The Fisherman’ is a short poem illustrated by Kittelsen. The spirit of the highlands is depicted as a fisherman with a face full of furrows standing silently next to the lake. He disappears as quietly as he enters the scene, never uttering a single word.

Moser, I vakre, vilde (5th ed., 123; *missing in other editions*)

Another short poem, ‘O Mosses, ye Beautiful and Wild’, praises the ability of moss (*Bryophyta*) and other plants to live in absolute contact with soil and nature as a whole, accepting the coming and going of the seasons as well as inevitable death.

***NORDLAND* (1st ed., 149–74; *missing in 4th and 5th ed.*)**

The section called *Nordland* (formally, the name of a county in Northern Norway but often used in a looser sense, i.e., the ‘northern lands’ of Norway in general) was only included in the first edition of *Norsk Høifjeld*. Caspari’s *Nordland* is, first and foremost, the kingdom of the sea, especially the fjords and islets of Lofoten and Helgeland, introduced in a quotation from Welhaven as the true *Alfeland* (Land of the Elves).

Caspari acquired these first impressions on a voyage with the coastal steamer *DS Finmarken* and vocalized them many years later. The portrayal is both magnificent and colourful, but although many mountains can be seen from the ship, the text is not about the Norwegian highlands, which is probably why it was excluded in later editions.

Nordland begins dramatically, in the midst of a winter storm, with the ‘master of fjords’ – Vestfjorden just south of Lofoten – in uproar. An accompanying image illustrates the sombre morning mood when MS *Finmarken* enters the fierce waters of Vestfjorden, with the Lofoten mountains barely discernible in the background. The mood of the personified Vestfjord is more upbeat, however. In summer, when Caspari visits Vestfjorden again, it lies still, with the midnight sun shining above it, green emeralds sparkling on its shores. The Vestfjord is now eager to marry his bride: the lush birch forests of a remote valley. The Seven Sisters (Syv søstre), a famous range of mountains outside Helgeland, act as bridegrooms. The text takes several detours, such as when Caspari describes a river running through the untouched birch forest – the *Urskog* of *Nordland*. Everywhere, he praises the sublime summer scenery, subtly mocking a group of tourists who spend ten minutes in the Trollfjord without leaving the ship to visit the idyllic mountain landscape surrounding the fjord.

The second part (p. 169 on) describes the arrival of the polar winter. With autumn and the gradual return of winter, everything withers and dies. The famous glacier Svartisen symbolizes *Nordlaands Kaar* (the life conditions of *Nordland*). In stormy, icy cold weather, Svartisen

becomes the evil eye of Nordland ('Nordlands onde Øie'). A desolate farm lies just below the glacier, where loneliness personified descends upon whomever spends the night there in late autumn:

I den blege Kveld, naar Nordlyset blusser og flagrer over Bræøiet; og Elven sort og stille sturer under Isdækket, i den blege Kveld, naar Evighedens Aande suser over Dalen, da stiger han ned fra Svartisen.

Fjetret af hans kolde Blik, af hans tause Tungsind, gir Nordlændingen sig langsomt over i Vinternattens Søvn.

(In the pale night, when the northern light sparkles and flaps above the eye of the glacier, and the river mutters underneath the layer of ice, in the pale night, when the spirit of eternity seethes above the valley, he [i.e. loneliness] descends from Svartisen.

Baffled by his cold gaze, by his silent sombreness, the Nordlander slowly gives in to the sleep of the winter night.)

The symmetry of nature and human inhabitants – and the deep impact that climate and landscape wield on the latter – is characteristic of Caspari's writings. The aurora borealis is part of the personified gallery of 'powers' that impact the life conditions of men and women in and around the Norwegian highlands.

Min Bregne (1st ed., 175–6; 4th ed., 51; 5th ed., 51)

'My Fern' is a poem consisting of five verses dedicated to the fern *Polypodiopsida* or *Polypodiophyta*. In place of roses or lilies, known for their beauty and fragrance, the lyrical self proclaims their love for the simple ferns of the forests and wilderness. Even in death, the lyrical self prefers their grave to be planted with a fern instead of a more sophisticated flower. This poem concludes the first edition of the book, whereas it has been placed more centrally in later versions.

VINTERLIV (4th ed., 117–36; *section named Vintereventyr in 5th ed., 125–51; missing in 1st ed.*)

This section, Winter Life, consists mainly of extracts from *Vintereventyr* (Winter Fairy Tale), a collection of poems first published in 1901. In the fifth edition, this section is entitled *Vintereventyr* instead of *Vinterliv*.

Der staar en lystig Herrefærd (4th ed., 119; 5th ed., 127–8; *missing in 1st ed.*)

With the subtitle *Skivise* (Skiing Song), 'A Movement of Lords is Taking Place' introduces the theme of winter. It is early morning and affluent visitors are out on their skis, full of joy. The winter sports of the upper classes are tied closely together with the recurrent topoi of Fatherland and Mother Earth. This poem is illustrated by Kittelsen.

Orreleg (4th ed., 120; *spelt* Orrelek in 5th ed., 129; *missing in 1st ed.*)

‘Courtship Ritual of the Black Grouse [*Lyrurus tetrix*]’ is a short poem, in which an old black grouse, out of season, scares a hare by suddenly crowing loudly in the starlit winter night. The illustrations are by Kittelsen.

Halvor Kletten (4th ed., 121-2; 5th ed., 130-2; *missing in 1st ed.*)

This is a slightly ironic, rhyming song about the countryside couple Halvor and Kari Kletten and their many kids. It is illustrated by Kittelsen.

Nytaarsløier (4th ed., 125-35; 5th ed., 135-46; *missing in 1st ed.*)

‘Jokes of the New Year’ consists of a series of short poems or songs, each with its own subheading: ‘Jeg sto i skogen en vinterkveld’ (I was Standing in the Woods one Winter’s Night), ‘Gangar’ (Marching Song), ‘Jubilate’ (O be Joyful), ‘Kongesang’ (Royal Song), ‘Haredans’ (Dance of the Hares), ‘Huskomhei’ (O, my!), and ‘Ugleskrik’ (The Hooting of an Owl). Some are lyrical, some less serious in style. Two of these parts are highly relevant for the aurora borealis.

Jubilate

With a title echoing Psalm 100, ‘Jubilate’ is a three-verse poem serenading the aurora borealis. It tells of how only when there are beaches of snow and the sound of humming guitars and bassoons, does the *Vinterdrot* (King Winter) appear, his head adorned with the northern lights. He ascends to the throne, wrapped in emeralds, clothed in linen, crowned with the northern lights and with the canopy of heaven above. All the bells are ringing and the trees of the forest bend under its yellow wings. The high king of the adventure, King Winter is near.

This poem conveys a more poetic, traditional idea of the northern lights. Crowning a god-like character, the phenomenon is associated with the cold season and brings with it a heavenly sound, as described earlier in the *Præludium*. Here, the colours of the northern lights are described as emerald and gold, although the latter is not typically seen in this phenomenon. In more southern regions, where the northern lights are seldom seen today, they are usually described as orange-red. But in the North, they often appear as emerald green and white. Nonetheless, what is described in the poem are the lights’ yellow or golden ‘wings’, probably alluding to their flickering movement.

An illustration by Theodor Kittelsen is featured on the page facing this part of the Nyttårsløier series. It shows two people skiing in a wintry forest with a huge god-like figure before them that reminds the reader of the spirit of the forest. Bright rays of light illuminate the sky above. These rays look more like sunrays, but it is clear from the text that they are supposed to represent the

northern lights. In depictions from the eighteenth century (see, for example, *Aurorae Borealis Studia Classica*, [vol. IV](#)), the aurora was often presented like this; thus Kittelsen's illustration is part of a long tradition.

Kongesang

'Royal Song' pays homage to the holy winter, the king of earth. It consists of three verses that describe the essential qualities of winter – that it arrives when the leaves fade, that it muffles all the sounds and the shining flora, that it allows dreams to emerge and magic to flow and kindles the twinkling torches of the north with flutes and violins. Those 'torches of the north' may well be an allusion to the aurora borealis, but this is not made explicit either in the text or in any accompanying illustration. At the end, the Winter King rises from his throne, raises his sceptre, and commands the Seven Stars to sparkle in brilliance, calling upon everything that lives and breathes to break into dance.

Skogens Vinterhave (5th ed., 147–9; *missing in other editions*)

'The Winter Garden of the Forest' is a short poem that praises a small piece of ground in the shade of a towering spruce tree. Uncovered by snow, it allows the evergreen moss to persist; although completely frozen, it is a treat to behold.

Norge, mit Norge (4th ed., 136; 5th ed., 150; *missing in 1st ed.*)

'O Norway, my Norway' is a condensed song celebrating the yearly seasons, beginning with winter. Characteristically for Caspari, the introduction of autumn is blended with the autumn of the poet's life and his ultimate burial in the 'holy soil' of 'Norway, my mother' (*Norge, min Mor, ... i din hellige Jord*). The poem is illustrated by Kittelsen.