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## Editor's Foreword

Since 1992, there have been seven annual volumes of *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies*, and with this present volume my editorship comes to an end. At this point, I would like to thank the large number of evaluators whose comments helped me in making decisions on which articles to publish. As well, comments from evaluators helped many of the authors of the published papers in their revisions. Furthermore, there are still a fair number of authors whose papers have been accepted, subject to revisions recommended by readers. I also would like to thank Professor Juhani Härmä, University of Helsinki, who on many occasions came to my rescue by providing me with translations of abstracts into French.

Again, I wish to express my appreciation to the readers without whose efforts this publication would not be possible. If the following list has omitted any person who acted as reader over the last eight years, I offer my apologies for this omission; it is a mere oversight.

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I wish the new editor success in her endeavours and I hope that submissions to the journal will be plentiful to ensure its continued success.

Wolfgang P. Ahrens  
Editor (1992-1999)





# Go West, Young Dane: Danish Settlements on the Canadian Prairies

Christopher Hale  
*University of Alberta*

**ABSTRACT:** Most of the first group of Danes to move into the Canadian prairies at the turn of the century came via the United States. Especially influential in this stage of settlement was the Danish United Church which sponsored many of these moves. Only after the First World War did most immigration come directly from Denmark, though by that time the main Danish colonies on the prairies had already been established. By the beginning of the 1930's the flow of immigrants to Canada had ceased for all intents and purposes until it started again after World War II.

This paper gives a brief survey of these earlier phases of Danish immigration to Prairie Canada. Included is a discussion of some of the reasons for Danes immigrating to Canada during these two periods and the part the church, the Canadian government and railways played in it. In conclusion some possible explanations are offered as to why the Danish language and Danish traditions survived longer in some settlements than in others.

**RÉSUMÉ:** La majorité du premier groupe de Danois qui se sont installés dans les Prairies canadiennes vers 1900 sont arrivés par les États-Unis. L'église danoise unie, qui les a soutenus financièrement plusieurs fois, a joué un rôle particulièrement important dans cette période de la colonisation. Ce n'est qu'après la Première Guerre mondiale que la majorité des immigrants sont arrivés directement du Danemark, même si, à ce moment-là, les principales colonies danoises dans les prairies étaient déjà établies. Au début des années 30, le flot d'immigrants au Canada avait en fait cessé, avant de prendre un nouvel essor après la Deuxième Guerre mondiale.

Cet article présente un rapide survol des premières phases de l'immigration danoise dans les Prairies canadiennes. Il comprend un examen de certaines des raisons qui ont conduit les Danois à immigrer au Canada durant ces deux périodes et du rôle qu'y ont joué l'église, le gouverne-

ment canadien et les chemins de fer. Pour conclure, seront proposées quelques hypothèses pour expliquer pourquoi la langue danoise et les traditions danoises ont survécu plus longtemps dans certaines colonies que dans d'autres.

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Danish immigration to Prairie Canada can be divided into three distinct phases. The first began in the latter part of the nineteenth century, continuing up to the start of World War I with most of the settlers coming from the United States rather than directly from Denmark. The second phase spans the period from the end of World War I until the onset of the Great Depression, that is about 1930, with the majority of immigrants now coming straight from Denmark. The final phase commenced just after World War II and lasted into the 1970s when Canada began imposing strict quotas on immigration. Whereas people settling in rural districts characterized the previous two periods, the last phase saw most Danes settling in urban areas. It is accordingly the first two periods that are of most concern in the following discussion.

In this paper I shall give a brief survey of these, until now, little focussed upon earlier phases of Danish emigration to Canada, in particular the more prominent of the western colonies. As well, I will offer some possible explanations as to why the Danish language and traditions survived longer in some of these settlements than in others.

Like so many other European countries, Denmark experienced a drastic increase in its population during the nineteenth century. In fact, between 1800 and the outbreak of World War I, it nearly tripled to 3,000,000. This was the result of a number of factors including a general increase in the birth rate and improvements in medical care. Since the rural economy was unable to cope with this increase in population, many Danes migrated to the cities, and if they had difficulty surviving there, they often left the country altogether. A further factor that induced many Danes to leave was the Prussian absorption of Schleswig-Holstein in 1864. This emigration from Denmark started already in the 1840s, but it did not really begin in earnest until the 1860s. The goals of these emigrants included South America, Australia, New Zealand, and most particularly the United States, where the wave of immigration crested in 1882. However, at this time there were probably very few Danes in Canada. According to studies made by Kristian Hvidt (1971, 1975), the

largest numbers of Danish immigrants came from the southeast, including Bornholm, Lolland, Falster and Langeland, and the northwest, including Vendsyssel and Himmerland, while the fewest came from central Jutland and northern Sjælland (Hvidt 1975: 41 map). Interestingly enough, unlike the case with emigrants from other Scandinavian countries, Hvidt found that a greater number of people emigrated from the cities between 1900 and 1914 than from the countryside (Hvidt 1975: 45), with a large number of them being tradesmen, journeymen and white collar workers (Hvidt 1975: 103–22, especially 118 tables), though presumably many of those listed as city dwellers would have come originally from the countryside.

The Canadian government started promoting immigration later than the United States did. It was not until 1872, ten years after the United States, for example, that a homestead act, *The Dominion Lands Act*, was passed in Canada. Whereas the United States completed its transcontinental railway in 1869, Canada did not finish its railway until 1885. It was only after that year that the western Canadian Prairies were really opened up for settlement. The influx of immigrants to the Canadian West during the following period until the beginning of the Depression was encouraged by the Canadian railways, in particular the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). The railways owned much of the land there and desired the establishment of settlements so they could profit from the transport of grain and passengers. An additional factor encouraging immigration was a rise in the price of wheat toward the end of the century.

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, cheap land in the United States was becoming scarce, and word about the availability of inexpensive land in Canada began to reach many people who were looking to establish farms on the Prairies, but who were finding it almost impossible to do so south of the Canadian border. This included many Danes who had already moved to the United States. They were often induced to move to Canada, either as individual settlers or in groups. The latter frequently established colonies in Canada, following the example of many of their fellow countrymen in the U.S. In fact, unlike the case of the Norwegians and Swedes, this tendency to settle in colonies became a characteristic trait of Canadian Danish immigration.

The two main Danish churches in America, the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church (DELIC) and the United Danish Evangelical

Lutheran Church (UDELIC), were both interested in having Danes settle in colonies and were active in this regard in Canada. The DELC was heavily influenced by the teachings of N.F.S. Grundtvig and his emphasis on the "folkelig" (pertaining to the national culture of the Danish people) as well as the "kirkelig" (pertaining to the church and the Christian faith) in church work. The Grundtvigians believed that the Bible was descriptive, and while it might be used for guidance or as solace, the true word of God was revealed in the sacraments. On the other hand, the UDELIC, dominated by the Inner Mission, was very pietistic and believed that the Bible, being the true word of God, should be interpreted literally. This difference in the two churches is reflected in their reasons for desiring Danish colonial settlement. The DELC felt that it was in colonies that Danes could best cultivate "det folkelige" with its emphasis on the preservation of Danish language and culture. The UDELIC, on the other hand, wanted to establish colonies where people of the same faith could live and cultivate their common religious bonds.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, it was the UDELIC that was responsible for the formation of the majority of Danish colonies in Canada.

The first one of these was Dickson near Innisfail in Alberta (Christensen 1973; Nissen et al. 1991; *Dickson* 1948). Around the turn of the century, a group of UDELIC Danes in Omaha, Nebraska, were interested in obtaining farms, but the prices in the mid-western United States were more than they felt they could afford. They had, however, heard that there was cheap land in Canada. In the fall of 1902, they sent two scouts up to Alberta to look over a tract of land that had been recommended by an agent of the CPR. The two men, one a bricklayer and the other a bicycle repairman, arrived at the site during that winter and were especially impressed by the large, flat areas of land with tall grass growing up through the snow. These favourable observations convinced the others in the group that this would be the ideal spot in which to settle. Many older members of the congregation, though, were afraid that their church would be significantly weakened with so many of its younger people leaving. Therefore, the prospective colonists agreed to form a congregation before they departed, and so, ironically, the first Danish Lutheran congregation in Canada was established in Omaha, Nebraska, U.S.A.!

In the spring of 1903, the first pioneers left for Alberta, with the rest arriving during the summer. What the scouts had taken for a fertile

meadow was in reality a slough with slough grass growing in it. In fact, the whole area was very wet with water standing in places until far into the spring. This caused considerable problems during the early years, and it was not until after 1916, when a drainage system was started, that the water problem in the Dickson area was finally resolved (Nissen et al. 1991: 83). The colony was called Dickson after the nearby Dickson Creek, named after an early Norwegian settler "Benedickson" (Harrison 1994: 72).

The church played a central role in the Dickson colony right from the very start. Before the first pastor arrived in 1904, people gathered for the reading of sermons and the singing of hymns in each other's homes. A church was finally built in 1911. During the early period almost all the settlers belonged to the UDELC, and since the settlement, too, was quite isolated in the beginning, these factors reinforced the pious character of the colony. Through the years, many social organizations were formed under the auspices of the church, such as a choir, a drum and fife band, a young people's society, a ladies' aid and a mission society (Nissen et al. 1991: 74). There were about forty families living in the Dickson area and less than one dozen in nearby Kevisville by the mid-1920s (Frimodt Møller: 46).

Standard was the second colony to be established in Canada by the UDELC.<sup>2</sup> In 1908 members of the church's Colonization Committee travelled from the United States to Alberta to look over a tract of land east of Calgary that was owned by the CPR. The year after, two farmers from Elk Horn, Iowa, came to the same area, were very impressed with what they saw and bought, each of them, 160 acres of land. Afterward the two men went to Calgary where they tried to persuade the CPR to set aside 17,000 acres in the area for Danish settlers. The railroad agreed provided that enough Danes could be persuaded to buy land there in the course of the summer. The advantages of this land were that it was very fertile and though 15 miles from the nearest town and railroad, by 1911 the CPR promised to have a sideline running through the area and also promised to furnish inexpensive excursions to people interested in purchasing land (Bredmose Simonsen 1991: 96). In 1909, 23 Danes bought land in the area, with the first colonists arriving the following spring. One of the first immigrants, Jens Rasmussen, suggested that the settlement be called "Dana," but the CPR objected to this, since there already was a town of that name on one of their lines in Saskatchewan.

After several other suggestions, one of the Company's men informed Rasmussen that the colony would be named "Standard", but the reason for this name is obscure (Jens Rasmussen 1943: 15-6). Though the first congregation in Standard was established in 1911, a church was not built until 1917. In spite of some difficult years at the beginning, by the 1920s, the settlement had become quite prosperous, and there were approximately 1000 Danes living in the district (Frimodt Møller: 40).

Dalum, situated above the coulees near Wayne, Alberta, just south of Drumheller, was the third church colony to be established in Canada prior to the end of World War I.<sup>3</sup> It was founded under the auspices of the Dansk Folkesamfund (The Danish People's Society), an arm of the Grundtvigian DELC, which in 1916 approached the CPR regarding a 20,000 acre area of land. The following year an agreement was reached with the railroad, and the first settlers arrived that spring, though the majority of them did not come until the spring of 1918. By the 1920s, most of the land had been taken and there were about 200 Danes living in the area (Frimodt Møller: 42). It was decided to name the settlement Dalum after an agricultural school in Denmark. The majority of these first settlers were bachelors who had little or no experience in farming.

A congregation was formed in 1918, and in 1920 Pastor Peter Rasmussen came from the United States. Rasmussen had had considerable experience with Grundtvigian high schools in the United States and had been principal of one in Ashland, Michigan, before coming to Canada. Accordingly, he established a folk high school on his farm shortly after his arrival. As well as adhering to the Grundtvigian principle of being a "school for life", it also served to acquaint newly arrived Danes with the English language and to prepare them for life in Canada. After the onset of the Great Depression, fewer and fewer Danes attended classes, and the school was forced to close in 1935 (Buschardt Christensen 1991: 108-10). Rasmussen also held an annual "Folkefest" (People's Festival) in the coulee behind his farm where talks were given, songs were sung and folk dancing performed. These gatherings were attended by Danes from all over the province.

Only one other significantly large Danish colony, Dannevirke, was founded on the Prairies before World War I. In this case, it was not a church that established it, but rather an individual, Simon Hjortnæs. Hjortnæs had immigrated with his parents to South Dakota from Vendsyssel in Northern Jutland in the early 1890s at the age of eleven.

The story of Hjortnæs' coming to Canada has become a virtual legend in the Canadian Danish community. In 1901, some of his horses went astray, and Hjortnæs set out to find them. After scouting the land just across the border in southeastern Saskatchewan, near the towns of Redvers and Alida, he located them, but before leaving, he purchased a homestead there. The following year he moved up to Canada and sent for his father and three brothers as well.

The folklorist Frank Paulsen, who visited Prairie Canada in 1972, claims to have collected variants of the legend in every Danish settlement he visited, from Alberta to Manitoba. By some accounts, Hjortnæs lost his horses in Minnesota; in others, it was South Dakota, North Dakota, or Montana.

In some cases he was led to their whereabouts by a Norwegian wizard, in others by a woman fortune teller. In one instance, the horses got away from him when he slipped and broke his shoulder bone; in another, when the wind made a commotion by blowing against the side of his tin-covered wagon; in yet another, he allowed the horses to forage for the winter, and they strayed off.

(Paulsen 1974: 73)

However, according to Paulsen people said that the story was invented. In reality, it was probably Hjortnæs's father who sent him up in 1902 to have a look around. When he returned and gave a favourable report, his father decided to finance the move up to Canada (Paulsen 1974: 74). At any rate, Hjortnæs became a well-to-do farmer, owned a number of farms, and encouraged many Danes to come to Redvers/Alida. The colony became known as Dannevirke after the medieval rampart that was built along the old German-Danish border. It was rumoured that the CPR paid Hjortnæs twenty-five dollars for each immigrant he persuaded to come to the colony (Paulsen 1974: 76).<sup>4</sup> Later on, he was known as 'King of the Danes', and made several trips back to Denmark, where he gave lectures and promoted immigration to Canada (Sandemose 1929). Many of the immigrants who came to Dannevirke over the years moved on to other locations, but there were about 300 people living there in the mid-1920s (Frimodt Møller: 37).

There were two relatively important colonies founded on the Prairies after World War I. The first of these was Ostensfeld, started by the UDELIC. In 1926 Niels Damskov, who at the time was the Danish Immigration Pastor in Winnipeg, arranged with the Government of Manitoba to have a tract of land reserved for purchase by a small group

of Danes about thirty miles southeast of Winnipeg (Paulsen 1974: 81). Winnipeg was the railway hub of western Canada, and virtually all immigrants to the Prairie Provinces from Europe had to pass through the city. Damskov would meet all the immigrant trains, seek out the Danes and help them find employment or get established further west. Most of these immigrants he sent on to Simon Hjortnæs in Dannevirke, but eventually he wanted to found his own colony. Damskov had come to Winnipeg in 1919 from Sidney, Montana, although he had been born in Denmark. He was responsible for establishing a Danish church in Winnipeg. Help to build the church there was provided by Bishop Harald Ostenfeld, who came to visit the city in 1923 and who managed to get a grant of 10,000 Danish kroner from the Danish Church Abroad for the purpose (Bredmose Simonsen 1991: 99). The new colony was thus named in honour of the Bishop.

Ostenfeld is located just past the eastern edge of the Red River Valley in an area that is quite heavily wooded and has fairly rocky soil. It thus proved very difficult for many people to get started there. Rumours had it that Damskov, when he met the immigrant trains, would question arriving Danes about their financial affairs. If it turned out that they had some money, Damskov would exert pressure on them to purchase land in Ostenfeld.<sup>5</sup> There were also rumours that he was an agent for the CPR and was paid for immigrants he managed to persuade to settle in Canada.<sup>6</sup>

Probably the most recent Danish colony in Prairie Canada is the one about ten miles west of Tilley, Alberta founded by members of the UDELIC, surprisingly in 1930, just as the Great Depression was beginning.<sup>7</sup> The CPR owned irrigated land in southern Alberta that it was trying to sell in the late 1920s, and it had agents, among other places, in the United States. A group of Danish immigrants in Hardy, Nebraska, heard about this land, and in August 1929 three people accompanied by a CPR agent were sent up to Alberta to investigate. Two of the men bought farms on the spot. The terms for acquiring land were very favourable and included a loan of \$1000 from the CPR for the setting up of buildings and fences. Since most of the Danes in Hardy were tenant farmers and there were severe drought conditions in the area, it was relatively easy to persuade a number of them to make the move north.

As had happened with the Nebraska Danes moving to Dickson, before leaving it was decided that a congregation should be formed. This



was done on October 9, 1929, and Pastor A. N. Skanderup in Laurel, Nebraska, was called upon to lead it. Skanderup thus secured a block of land from the CPR and became its agent. In March of 1930, a caravan of five automobiles with about 30 people<sup>8</sup> made the eight-day drive to Tilley. There was an old abandoned house on one of the farms purchased the previous summer, and it was here the whole group lived during the first months until they could build their own dwellings. The Tilley colony survived the Depression, probably in large part because the land was irrigated.

Not many Danish traditions have survived in the Prairie colonies. In a few places, people might still celebrate Christmas Eve in the Danish manner, but few other Danish holidays are recognized. What has survived longest of Danish traditions is the serving of ethnic food. Still today one can visit the descendants of the Danish pioneers on the Prairies and be offered coffee with Danish baked goods.

As to language retention and the preservation of Danish traditions, Dalum has probably been the most successful at this of any of the Prairie colonies. Approximately thirty to forty people of the second generation in the area still speak Danish today. Ethnic Danish food is still prepared on special occasions, and at lunchtime, farmers, even those not of Danish descent, will still gather in the kitchen and make themselves open-faced sandwiches in the Danish manner (Hertel Rasmussen 1993). This is quite likely due in large part to the influence from the Grundtvigian DELC with its emphasis on the preservation of Danish culture and language.

Amazingly few Danish traditions are preserved in Dickson, and none of the typical Danish holidays observed. Even Danish Christmas traditions did not survive long, though dancing around the Christmas tree seems to have been preserved in the early years. The Danish language was used in the Dickson Church until the 1950s when it was discontinued after a long controversy that split the community. One of the reasons for its discontinuance seems to have been the Canadian nationalistic sentiment that was generated during World War II. Also cited is the inability of the younger people to understand Danish; however, many of the second generation in Dickson were able to do so, even though most were not able to speak it with any degree of fluency (Paulsen 1974: 18–21). Today only a few people who as children emigrated with their parents from Denmark between the two world wars are

able to converse in the language (Nissen 1993). This loss of Danish traditions and language is likely due to a considerable extent to the fact that the UDELIC played such a large part in the daily life of the community. Being a missionary church, it placed primary emphasis on the saving of souls and regarded the preservation of Danishness as a secondary concern at best. In 1991 the local store in Dickson, which had been owned and operated by the Christiansen family, was officially opened by Queen Margarethe II of Denmark. However, its main purpose is to represent life typical of pioneer days in general, rather than to focus on Danish Prairie life in particular, though the store does have some Danish items on display.

Standard seems to have been quite Danish in its early years, but it rapidly became Canadianized and occupies a middle position between Dalum on the one hand and Standard on the other. Though English began being used in the church already in the 1920s (Paulsen 1974: 44), about two dozen people in the second generation still speak Danish the area. They usually celebrate Christmas Eve in the Danish tradition and occasionally make Danish food specialties (Larsen 1993). While founded by UDELIC members, unlike Dickson, the colony was very prosperous in the period between the two world wars before the Great Depression, and Danes from many walks of life came and went. As a result, the influence of the church was decidedly less there than in Dickson, perhaps helping to preserve the language and traditions better.

Dannevirke was also quite prosperous. But the fact that that colony was not founded by a church and therefore lacked the cohesiveness that such an institution could bring in the early years undoubtedly contributed to the fact that the Danish language and traditions have virtually disappeared there. It was served by pastors of the UDELIC, but a church was not erected until the mid-1920s between Redvers and Alida. Since the early 1950s, services have been entirely in English (Paulsen 1974: 72). A new church was dedicated in Redvers in 1973, and the old one sold and torn down shortly afterward.

It seems that many of the original settlers eventually left Ostfeld, as only two of them still lived there in 1939. By World War II Danish had ceased being used in the church, and most of the children had moved to the cities. All Danish traditions were quickly lost, except for the serving of traditional food at Christmas time (Paulsen 1974: 81).

As for the case of Tilley, today most traces of Danishness have disappeared. This is probably because the majority of the original settlers had already lived for a fair length of time in the United States, and thus all members of the colony were quite familiar with English. As a result, though spoken by most of the first generation, the Danish language was not handed down to the second generation. About the only Danish traditions that survive are the celebration of Christmas Eve and Danish baking (Nielsen and Hendricksen 1993).

First generation Danes have settled in most urban areas in Prairie Canada and have established various clubs and organizations there. In 1981, the Federation of Danish Associations in Canada was founded. It is the umbrella organization for over thirty-five Danish ethnic groups, in which many of these Danes, most of whom immigrated to Canada after World War II, are very active. It publishes a conference book each year which contains articles about the various member organizations and biographies of Canadian Danes. The most ambitious project in western Canada, which the Federation has given its support to, is the Danish Canadian National Museum which is to be located in Dickson. Most of the impetus for this endeavour has come from the first generation Danes, and the descendants of the Dickson Danes have played only a supporting part in it (Nielsen 1998).

Today casual tourists driving through any of the old Danish Prairie colonies will not see many traces of Danishness unless they get together with older members of the communities. About the only outward manifestations of Danishness are found in Dalum and Tilley where a person driving along the highway can still see churches built in typically Danish country style with white walls and red tiled roofs.

## NOTES

1. A history of the Danish churches in America is Henrik Bredmose Simonsen. *Kampen om danskheden. Tro og nationalitet i de danske kirkesamfund i Amerika* (Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 1990). Except for several paragraphs devoted to each of the more important Canadian Danish settlements, this volume contains only scattered references to Canada. An article by the same author, "The Early Life of the Danish Churches in Canada", dealing with some aspects of Danish-Canadian churches is found in *Danish Emigration to Canada*, ed. by Henning Bender and Birgit Flemming Larsen. Udvandrerarkivets skriftserie: Udvandrerhistoriske studier nr. 3 (Ålborg: 1991), 91–105.

2. The main source for the history of Standard is a pamphlet written by Jens Rasmussen, *History of the Standard Colony from its Birth* (Standard, Alberta: 1943). *From Danaview to Standard* (Standard, Alberta: Standard Historical Book Society 1979) contains short family histories of both Danish and non-Danish residents.

3. For an account of the history of Dalum and the folk high school, written by members of the community, see *The History of Dalum* (Drumbheller, Alberta: The Big Country News 1968) and *Reflections—Dalum and Area* (Dalum, Alberta: Dalum History Book Committee, 1990) both of which also include family histories of a number of the Danish Settlers.

4. Paulsen 1974: 76. The author Aksel Sandemose in an entry for October 2, 1927 in his Canada diary (now in Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen) also alludes to this.

5. Aksel Sandemose in his Canada diary alludes to this in a number of entries.

6. During a trip through the Canadian Prairies in the summer of 1984, the researcher recalls hearing several Danes who had immigrated to the Redvers/Alida area of Saskatchewan between the two World Wars mention this.

7. The history of Tilley, including the Danish settlement and family histories, is found in *Tilley Tales and Trails* (Tilley, Alberta: Tilley Historical Society 1980). A history of the Danish congregation there is *Bethany Lutheran Church, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary, 1930–1955* (n.p., and n.d.) and its updated version *Bethany Lutheran Church, Tilley, Alberta, 1930–1980* (n.p., and n.d.).

8. Sources vary on the exact number. The earlier book on the Bethany Church mentions thirty (1), the later Bethany book twenty-eight (18), and *Tilley Tales and Trails* lists twenty-eight (251).

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# Homer, Aristotle and the Sagas of the Icelanders

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ABSTRACT: "Homer, Aristotle and The Sagas of Icelanders" has two purposes. The first is carefully to consider whether the saga writers in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries had a more direct knowledge of the Homeric poems than is usually thought. The regular visits to Constantinople of Icelanders in the Varangian Guard would surely have exposed them to the stories, at least, of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Several qualities of the sagas, including genesis, genealogy, hospitality and travel are distinctly parallel to Homer, if not a direct influence. Similarly, certain aspects of characterization are remarkably like principles of epic and tragedy outlined in Aristotle's *Poetics*. The second purpose is a rallying cry to English literary studies. The sagas are not as well known as they should be and, I think, less well known now than fifty years ago. The new publication in English of *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* should help remedy this.

RÉSUMÉ: "Homère, Aristote et les Sagas des Islandais" a deux objectifs. L'un est de considérer avec soin si les auteurs de sagas du XIII<sup>e</sup> et du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles connaissaient de manière plus directe les poèmes homériques qu'on ne le pense en général. Les visites régulières faites à Constantinople par les Islandais de la Garde Varangienne auraient pu leur faire connaître au moins les récits de *L'Iliade* et de *L'Odyssée*. Plusieurs des caractéristiques des sagas (genèse, généalogie, hospitalité, voyages) trouvent des parallèles nets chez Homère, s'il ne s'agit pas en fait d'une influence directe. De la même façon, certains aspects de la caractérisation ressemblent étonnamment aux principes de l'épopée et de la tragédie esquissés dans *La Poétique* d'Aristote. Le second objectif est un cri de ralliement aux études littéraires anglaises. Les sagas ne sont pas aussi bien connues qu'elles devraient l'être, et, me semble-t-il, elles sont moins connues actuellement qu'il y a cinquante ans. La nouvelle publication en anglais des *Sagas complètes des Islandais* devrait contribuer à remédier à cela.

It has become more and more common in recent decades to ignore or marginalize Icelandic literature in the English speaking world. A few of the sagas about the Norse/Celtic settlers of Iceland in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, which were written largely during the thirteenth and fourteenth, have enjoyed some vogue in English translation. William Morris's often quirky and archaic translations in the *Saga Library* between 1869 and 1892 were part of a fashion that brought seldom more than ten of the sagas to an English reading audience. A century ago interest and enthusiasm were genuine. In addition to the seminal translations by Morris, Eiríkr Magnússon, Dasent, Head, Muriel Press and others in the late nineteenth century, were the almost heroic scholarly and critical works by Guðbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell in 1883 and W.P. Ker in 1898.<sup>1</sup> When W.H. Auden and Louis MacNeice first visited Iceland in 1936, they were well versed in the literature and particularly moved by the landscape where the actions are set. *Letters from Iceland* (Faber and Faber, London, 1937) remembers and celebrates the likes of Njal, Gunnar and Grettir, and such places as Hlíðarendi and Snorri Sturluson's Reykholt. In a BBC/Faber junket in 1994, Simon Armitage and Glyn Maxwell followed in the footsteps, at least, of their predecessors. *Moon Country* (Faber and Faber, London, 1996), the book that resulted, reveals an almost total ignorance of Iceland's rich and significant literary history. This is despite the fine and readily available translations over the last thirty years of some of the major sagas by Hermann Pálsson, Magnus Magnússon, Denton Fox, George Johnston, Christine Fell, Gwyn Jones, Paul Edwards and Alan Boucher. This suggests to me something of the parochial and biased southern attitudes from which 'English' literature has been suffering in the last few decades; attitudes which ignore or deny the profound importance of the North. It is also, surely, a result of the fads and fashions of literary 'theory' that have encouraged generations of young scholars and critics to ignore the literary text for the sake of some new and arcane trend. It is no coincidence that much recent and valuable research on the old literature is the work of anthropologists and legal scholars like Jesse Byock and William Ian Miller.<sup>2</sup>

The recent publication of *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders (including 49 tales)*<sup>3</sup> in co-ordinated English translation is, therefore, an event of profound literary significance. It will give a huge population access to a major literature previously available only in dribs and drabs.



In addition, it will facilitate a reevaluation of the nature of Northern Europe a thousand years ago. The work will force many of us to rethink old assumptions about oppositions between the polished classicism of Mediterranean Greece and Rome and Northern barbarism. It also should surely add some measure of balance to certain recent and parochial debates about Europe especially in England. Finally, it should lead many of us to consider other phases of Iceland's literary history. It has been the most literary European country virtually since the settlement began in 874, and the most literate since the introduction of writing in the eleventh century. Many of its conventions and traditions remain unbroken. Having the entire canon for the first time allows the English reader more readily to understand certain qualities of the saga style that seem curious or obstructive when read in a piecemeal fashion. Several of these, including the entire canon as epic, genealogy, concerns of travel and hospitality, characterization, and certain thematic echoes strike me as having roots in the epic poems of Homer and certain of Aristotle's literary theories

In both narrative method and literary intention, *The Sagas of Icelanders* have interesting parallels with ancient Greek traditions and conventions. Notions of the Renaissance have shaped the usual English academic understanding of our relationship with ancient Rome and Greece. That is to say by an initially Florentine, then increasingly broadly Western European movement, that, after the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, led to a rediscovery of the ancient Greek roots of Roman and later Western culture. My contention here is that the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth century Icelandic scholars and historians had earlier access to Greek sources and traditions that may have been used in ways that give a particular cast and shape to the saga enterprise. We know from the sagas and many other sources that the Norse were in constant contact with the Byzantine Empire. The Imperial Guard, the Varangians, was alternately Norse or English. Harald Sigurdsson the Stern, who fell at Stamford Bridge in 1066, and was a great patron of Icelandic poets (and a fine poet himself), was a member of the Varangian Guard, and later its leader, from c. 1035 to 1044. The final episode of *The Saga Of Grettir The Strong* is set in Constantinople, during which Grettir's brother, Thorstein Drumond, himself a Varangian, takes revenge for his brother's slaying. Thorstein later marries and settles there, ultimately renouncing worldly things and devoting his life to God. Many others of the saga characters, like Halldor Snorrason, did

service there. And of course many ancient Germanic traditions and notions of the heroic age reached an unbroken climax and culmination in medieval Iceland; traditions and notions that trace their own genesis to the ancient Greek and Trojan world. One need simply remember the 'Prologue' to Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* in which he traces the foundations of Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Germany (and pointedly not England) to the *Æsir* considered as historical, and mortal, heroes from Priam's Troy.<sup>4</sup>

### *Genesis and Genealogy*

Two Greek traditions or influences that can help us better understand the sagas are Homeric and Aristotelian. The sagas, sometimes individually but certainly as a whole, are epic in several pointedly Homeric senses. One function of *Iliad* is to establish a sense of 'Greekness' as opposed to Trojan/Asian 'otherness'. The catalogue of the ships in Book II is, thus, the equivalent of a cultural genesis story. The listing continues for nearly 300 lines and includes 286 ships and their occupants:

Leitos and Penelos were leaders of the Boiotians,  
 with Arkesilaos and Prothoenor and Klonios;  
 they who lived in Hyria and in rocky Aulis,  
 in the hill-bends of Eteonos, and Schoinos, and Skolos,  
 Thespia and Graia, and in spacious Mykalessos;  
 they who dwelt about Harma and Eilesion and Erythrai,  
 they who held Eleon and Hyle and Peteon,  
 with Okalea and Medeon, the strong-founded citadel  
 Kopai, and Eutresis, and Thisbe of the dove-cotes;  
 they who held Koroneia, and the meadows of Haliartos,  
 they who held Plataia, and they who dwelt about Glisa,  
 they who held the lower Thebes, the strong-founded citadel,  
 and Onchestos the sacred, the shining grove of Poseidon;  
 they who held Arne of the great vineyards, and Mideia,  
 with Nisa the sacrosanct and uttermost Anthedon.  
 Of these there were fifty ships in all, and on board  
 each of these a hundred and twenty sons of the Boiotians.

(494–510)

A list of the inhabitants of another 236 ships, and their derivations, follows. There is an enormous variety of Achaians from many different places, but the working out of the war gives them something profoundly in common. A good example of Homeric genealogy occurs in Book XX when Aineias confronts Achilleus on the battlefield. After exchanging

insults Aineias gives Achilleus over 25 lines of his genealogy (I will omit the similes):

First of all Zeus who gathers the clouds had a son, Dardanos  
who founded Dardania, since there was yet no sacred Iliion  
made a city in the plain to be a centre of peoples,  
but they lived yet in the underhills of Ida with all her waters.  
Dardanos in turn had a son, the king, Erichthonios,  
who became the richest of mortal men...

Erichthonios had a son, Tros, who was lord of the Trojans,  
and to Tros in turn there were born three sons unfaulted,  
Ilos and Assarakos and godlike Ganymedes...

Ilos in turn was given a son, the blameless Laomedon,  
and Laomedon had sons in turn, Tithonos and Priam,  
Lamos, Klytios and Hiketaon, scion of Ares;  
but Assarakos had Kapys, and Kapys' son was Anchises,  
and I am Anchises' son, and Priam's is Hektor the brilliant.

(215-240)

Note that this genealogy covers eight generations (Zeus—Dardanos—Erichthonios—Tros—Assarakos—Kapys—Anchises—Aineias). Such catalogues and genealogies are central to the Homeric project. In the same manner a good deal of Odysseus' visit to the Land of the Dead in Book XI of the *Odyssey* has to do with the families of the dead, especially the presentation and stories of the Queens. The generations recounted are seldom more than four, but repeatedly family and genealogy are invoked:

And I saw Chloris, surpassingly lovely, the one whom Neleus  
married for her beauty, giving numberless gifts to win her.  
She was the youngest daughter of Iasos' son Amphion,  
who once ruled strongly over Orchomenos of the Minyai.  
So she was queen of Pylos and she bore him glorious children,  
Nestor and Chromios and proud Periklymenos.

(281-286)

Great epic, at root, has to do with genesis. Stories are gripping, events exciting, characters admirable or otherwise. Beneath these features is something larger. For the *Iliad* it is the beginning of a sense of 'sameness' amongst the Achaians. For the *Odyssey* it is the deeply ethical question of hospitality. For the *Aeneid* it is the foundation of Rome. For *Paradise Lost* it is Man's fall and the justification of "God's ways", and, of course a dramatization of part of the *Book of Genesis*. For the *Sagas of Icelanders* it is the genesis of a nation in all its variety and

complexity. Taken as a whole the canon can be seen as epic. It also explains and justifies the almost endless genealogies—a feature of the saga method that those encountering them for the first time often find curious or distracting. The genealogies serve at least three distinct, though related, functions: they face backwards to ancestors; they look forward to descendants; and some explain family lineages abroad.

The early chapters of *The Saga of the People of Laxardal* are an ecstasy of genealogy. Here is Chapter I:

A man called Ketil Flat-nose, the son of Bjorn Buna, was a powerful hersir in Norway and came from a prominent family. He lived in Romsdal in the Romsdal district, between South More and North More. Ketil Flat-nose was married to Yngvild, the daughter of Ketil the Ram, a man of good family. They had five children: one of their sons was Bjorn the Easterner, another Helgi Bjolan. One of their daughters, Thorunn Hyrna, was married to Helgi the Lean. Helgi the Lean was the son of Eyvind the Easterner and Rafarta, the daughter of Kjarval, king of the Irish. Another of Ketil's daughters, Unn the Deep-minded, was married to Olaf the White. Olaf the White was the son of Ingjald, son of Frodi the Valient, was killed by the descendants of Earl Sverting. Ketil's third daughter was called Jorunn Mansvitbrekka. Jorunn was the mother of Ketil the Lucky Fisher, who settled the farm Kirkjubaer. His son was Asbjorn, the father of Thorstein who was the father of Surt the father of Sighvat the Lawspeaker. (Kunz, V, 1)

As with Aineias' family tree in *Iliad*, this genealogy covers eight generations (Bjorn Buna—Ketil Flat-nose—Jorunn Mansvitbrekka—Ketil the Lucky Fisher—Asbjorn—Thorstein—Surt—Sighvat the Lawspeaker). On first exposure, such a list is mind numbing, but it becomes increasingly delightful to consider the significance of many of the players when other sagas are considered and such lists are compared. The purpose of such a genealogy is twofold: on the one hand the elevated, sometimes noble status of the settlers is established; on the other are practicalities of land claims and kinship in a period when family was central and what state there was lacked an executive or police force.

Unn the Deep-minded settles first in Caithness with her father Ketil. Her son, Thorstein the Red, becomes ruler of half of the Scottish kingdom, but is then murdered at Caithness. Ketil has died by now so Unn sets off to Iceland taking with her many notable people of good family. In a remarkable genealogy *en route* Unn arranges marriages for her daughters that establish the ruling dynasties of the Orkney and Faroe Islands. This genealogy adds a further fascination and sense of coher-

ence to the medieval Northern World in our readings of the sagas from Orkney and the Faroes.

A final, more parochial, example appears at the end of "The Tale of Thorstein Staff-Struck":

Bjarni was blessed with many descendants. His son was Skegg-Broddi, who appears frequently in sagas and was the most excellent man of his day. Bjarni's daughter was named Halla, the mother of Gudrid, whom Kolbein the Law-speaker married. Another of Bjarni's daughters was Yngvild, whom Thorstein Sidu-Hallsson married. Their son was Magnus, the father of Einar, the father of Bishop Magnus. Amundi was another of Thorstein and Yngvild's sons. He married Sigrid, the daughter of Thorgrim the Blind. Amundi's daughter was Hallfrid, the mother of Amundi, the father of Gudmund, the father of Magnus the Godi and of Thora, whom Thorvald Gizurarson married, and of another Thora, the mother of Orm of Svinfell. Another of Amundi's daughters was Gudrun, the mother of Thordis, the mother of Helga, the mother of Gudny Bodvarsdottir, the mother of Thord, Sighvat and Snorri Sturluson. Another of Amundi's daughters was Rannveig, the mother of Stein, the father of Gudrun, the mother of Arnfrid, whom Stout-Helgi married. Another daughter of Amundi was Thorkatla, the mother of Arnbjorg, the mother of Finn the Priest, Thorgeir and Thurid. And many leading men are descended from them.

(Maxwell, IV, 340)

This list, again of eight generations (Bjarni—Yngvild—Amundi—Gudrun—Thordis—Helga—Gudny Bodvarsdottir—Thord, Sighvat and Snorri Sturluson) neatly links the earlier settlers with the thirteenth century saga writing age, one of the lines of descent ending with Thord, Sighvat and Snorri Sturluson. Eight generations seems a long time to most of us but is not so great in kin distance in a land whose language has a vocabulary for extended blood relations—*ffórmennningar*: having the same great-grand-mother; *fimmennningar*: having the same great-great-grandmother, *sexmennningar*: having the same great-great-great-grandmother ... and so on back into the mists of time, or, at least, the settlement! In these terms the *Sagas of Icelanders* can be seen as genesis stories. Who we are as Icelanders, where we came from, and how we differ from others. The genealogies are central to this.

### *Echoes, Travel and Hospitality*

When I first read *Njal's Saga* I was struck by the Germanic/Norse notions of heroism that were varied enough to include Njal himself, Skarphedin and, of course, Gunnar of Hliðarendi. My reading sparked a memory of Homer that, initially, I imagined being coincidental. On re-

flection, and in direct comparison, the motif of the doomed hero who is prophesied to have two fates seems an echo or memory rather than pure chance. Both tone and tragic significance are remarkably similar. The fates that are foretold differ, of course, but the early deaths ensure immortal fame for both heroes.

For my mother Thetis the goddess of the silver feet tells me  
I carry two sorts of destiny to the day of my death. Either  
if I stay here and fight beside the city of the Trojans,  
my return home is gone, but my glory shall be everlasting;  
but if I return home to the beloved land of my fathers,  
the excellence of my glory is gone, but there will be a long life  
left for me, and my end in death will not come quickly.

(Achilleus to his foster-father Phoinix, *Iliad*, IX, 410–416)

"Give me your good advice," said Gunnar

"I will," said Njal. "Never kill more than once in the same bloodline, and never break any settlement which good men make between you and others, least of all if you have broken my first warning."

"I had thought that others would be more likely to do these things than me," said Gunnar.

"That's so," said Njal. "And yet you must bear in mind that if these two things happen, you will not have long to live. Otherwise you will live to be an old man."

(Cook, III, 66)

Njal and Gunnar rode together from the Thing. Njal said, "Please see to it, my friend, that you abide by this settlement, and remember what we have talked about before. Just as your first trip abroad brought you great honour, you will gain even more honour this time. Then you will come back home with great respect, and live to be an old man, and no one here will be your equal. But if you break this settlement and don't go abroad, you will be killed in this land, and that will be a terrible thing for your friends to bear."

(Cook, III, 86)

The necessities and demands of travel and hospitality also inform the saga world, itself quite similar to the Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Seas in the Homeric period—*island people, farmers, shepherds, pirates, merchants, raiders, warriors, travellers*. It is the sort of world where the treatment of strangers is central. Homer's *Odyssey* gives us several interesting parallels to the world of the Sagas. One of its recurrent themes is hospitality and the reception of strangers. The first event at Ithaca in the poem is the arrival of Athena, disguised as Mentos. Odysseus has been absent for twenty years, ten at the war in Troy, and ten more in his wandering. His wife and son, Penelope and Telemachos, are in a state of virtual siege in their palace. Over a hundred young local

men have moved in, assuming that Odysseus is dead and anxious to marry the widow. Telemachos, just twenty years old, is in despair about what to do. He sees Mentès at the door, being ignored by the suitors, and we are given the first of many formulaic greetings that occur throughout the epic:

he saw Athene

and went straight to the forecourt, the heart within him scandalized that a guest should still be standing at the doors. He stood beside her and took her by the right hand, and relieved her of the bronze spear, and spoke to her and addressed her in winged words: 'Welcome, stranger. You shall be entertained as a guest among us. Afterward, when you have tasted dinner, you shall tell us what your need is.'

(I, 118-124)

Only after the stranger is well and thoroughly washed, wine and dined, does Telemachos ask who she is and why she has come:

But come now, tell me this and give me an accurate answer.  
What man are you, and whence? Where is your city? Your parents?  
What kind of ship did you come here on? And how did the sailors  
bring you to Ithaka? What men do they claim that they are?  
For I do not think you could have travelled on foot to this country.

(I, 170-173)

Her advice to the young man is that he travel: first to Pylos to visit Nestor, then to Sparta to speak with Menelaos. Books I-IV of *Odyssey* recount this journey and clearly represent, on one level, the process of coming of age for a young man. He is regularly received well and treated nobly. He also hears repeatedly of the terrible fate of Agamemnon. Upon his return to Argos, his wife, Klytaimnestra, and her lover, Aigisthos, treacherously slaughtered him and his companions. It was seven years later that Orestes, Agamemnon's son, came of age in Athens and returned to Argos to wreak revenge. The story is gripping and gory epic stuff with obvious practical significance for the son of another heroic father. It is also a prime example of the abuse of hospitality. Indeed, gaining prestige through successful travel and the proper or improper treatment of strangers in one's house might be seen as the principal theme underlying the entire epic. Another memorable and gory example of appalling treatment of guests is in Book IX where Odysseus and his fellow raiders visit the island of the Cyclopes and spend some time with Polyphemos. He not only refuses to give the strangers a good welcome and guest gifts, but begins, systematically, to eat them two by

two. To escape, Odysseus and his men get Polyphemos dead drunk, vomiting gobbets of flesh, and blind him with a burning beam of olive wood. Episode after episode in the wanderings is focused by a concern with travel and the appropriate or inappropriate greeting.

Travelling is, of course, common currency in many of the sagas. Young men regularly earn their early reputation by travel abroad and their reception in the courts of Norway, Denmark, England and, on one occasion, Ireland. There is a fairly standard pattern in which they travel to Norway and are well received by the king, whom they come to serve in one way or another. The stories of Hallfred the Troublesome Poet and Thorgeir Havarsson in *The Saga of the Sworn Brothers* are good examples of this:

Hallfred sailed out to Norway. He sought an audience with Earl Hakon the Powerful who ruled Norway at that time. He went before him and greeted him. The earl asked who he was.

He said he was an Icelander, "and my mission is this, my lord, that I have composed a poem about you and wish for a hearing."

The earl said, "You seem like a man who deals boldly with rulers. You have that look about you, and you shall indeed have a hearing."

Hallfred recited the poem—it was a drapa—and performed it magnificently. The earl thanked him and gave him a great axe inlaid with silver, and fine clothes, and invited him to stay with him over the winter. Hallfred accepted the offer.

(Whaley, I, 232)

and

After that Thorgeir went to Denmark and, according to Thormod's verses, he was held in such high esteem that the Danes revered him almost as a king. From there, Thorgeir went to Norway to see King Olaf. He went before the king and greeted him warmly. This pleased Olaf, and he asked who he was.

He replied, "I am an Icelander and my name is Thorgeir."

The king said, "Are you Thorgeir Havarsson?"

Thorgeir answered, "The very same man."

The king said, "I have heard of you. You are a big man and have the look of a champion, but you are not endowed with great luck."

The king invited Thorgeir to stay and become one of his followers. He held Thorgeir in high esteem since he proved himself to be a brave and hardy champion wherever he went.

(Regal, II, 348)

In a common variation of this formula, the Icelander expresses a lack of interest in meeting the king, almost a sense of equality with him. The experiences of Hoskuld Dala-Kollsson and Kjartan Olafsson in *The Saga of the People of Laxardal* are good examples of this. In yet another



variation of the pattern the young hero has trouble with royalty but still manages to survive, sometimes to prosper. Egil Skallagrimsson and Grettir the Strong do this. Olaf 'the Peacock' Hoskuldsson is yet another interesting variation. He leaves Iceland as the bastard son of a concubine slave woman and returns the recognised grandson of the King of Ireland (although still the bastard son of a concubine slave woman!). His treatment in Norway is exemplary:

When Olaf Hoskuldsson came to him, King Harald received him well, but Gunnhild better still. They invited him to stay with them, and pressed him to accept. Olaf agreed and both he and Orn became king's men. Both the king and Gunnhild showed Olaf more honour than any other foreigner had ever been shown.  
(Kunz, V, 29)

Issues of hospitality are best-focused in *Egil's Saga* in which the appropriate treatment, or mistreatment, of guests is the narrative focus of many episodes outside Iceland. Two strike me as especially similar in effect to episodes in *Odyssey* during Odysseus's wanderings. In the first, in Norway, Egil journeys with Olvir and his men to collect rents. After a very rough passage they arrive at Atloy Island, near an estate of King Eirik Bloodaxe. It is run by Bard, who puts them up in an outbuilding and, protesting that he has no ale, gives them bread and butter and bowls of curds, followed by whey. He twice states that he'd give them better if he had it. King Eirik and Queen Gunnhild turn up shortly later and are given a feast with plenty of ale. Egil and his men then join in the drinking and after many a horn of ale, Bard tries to poison Egil. With the help of a splash of his own blood and a few appropriate runes, the drinking horn shatters. Shortly after in a passageway with Olvir vomiting his guts out, Egil runs Bard through with his sword and makes good his escape (81-84). Later in the saga Egil is back in Norway and goes on a mission for the king to collect tribute in Varmland. On the way, through a treacherous winter landscape, they arrive at Armod's farm. As in the Bard episode Armod gives them bowls of curds and a room for the night, protesting that he has nothing better. At her mother's suggestion Armod's ten- or eleven-year old daughter spills the beans. Armod slaps her but then brings in an exceptionally strong brew of ale. The drinking, itself formulaic and reminiscent of many a public bar in Northern Europe today, commences. When Egil's men have all but collapsed, and Egil feels he can go on no longer:

He stood up and walked across the floor to where Armod was sitting, seized him by the shoulders and thrust him up against a wall-post. Then Egil spewed a tor-

rent of vomit that gushed all over Armod's face, filling his eyes and nostrils and mouth and pouring down his chest. Armod was close to choking, and when he managed to let out his breath, a jet of vomit gushed out with it.

(Scudder, I, 142)

Next morning Egil goes to Armod's bedcloset intending to kill him. Wife and daughter plead for mercy. "Then Egil cut off his beard close to the chin, and gouged out one of his eyes with his finger, leaving it hanging on his cheek." This is the rollicking, almost comic, good stuff of Viking Egil at his best, but it strikes me that the equation of drinking, vomiting and blinding associated with a grave abuse of hospitality might reflect the memory, at least, of stories of Odysseus long ago.

Another episode having centrally to do with the treatment of strangers is in *The Saga of the People of Eyri*. The Hebridean woman, Thorgunna, erstwhile and abandoned mistress of Leif the Lucky from *Eirik the Red's Saga*, dies at Froda farm having requested that her body be buried at Skálholt "because something tells me that place will one day be the most venerated in Iceland." The coffin-bearers set off on the journey:

Nothing is told of their journey until they came south of Valbjarnarvellir. There they came to very wet boggy ground and the body often fell off the horse, but they kept going south to Nordura river, which they crossed at Eyarvad ford through deep water. The weather was stormy and there was very heavy rain.

They came at last to a farm in Stafholtstungur called Lower Nes, where they asked for lodgings but the farmer would not put them up. Since it was nearly night, they did not think they would be able to tackle the Hvita river that night. They unloaded their horses and carried the body into a storeroom outside the main door, and then went into the main room and took off their clothes, intending to spend the night there without food. The people of the farm went to bed while it was still daylight.

Once they were in their beds, they heard a great racket in the pantry, and wondered whether thieves had got inside. When they came to the pantry, they could see a tall woman standing there. She was completely naked, without a stitch on, and she was preparing a meal. The people who saw her were so frightened that they did not dare go near her. When the coffin-bearers heard this, they went to see what was going on. It was Thorgunna, and they all thought it was wise not to interfere with her. And when she had done what she wanted, she carried the food into the main room, set the table and served her meal.

Then the coffin-bearers said to the farmer, 'It may well be that before we leave, you'll consider yourself to have paid a high price for not putting us up.'

The farmer and the mistress of the house replied, 'We will gladly give you food and whatever other hospitality you need.'

As soon as the farmer had offered them hospitality, Thorgunna walked out of the main room and she was not seen again. After that a fire was lit in the main room, and the wet clothes taken off the guests and replaced with dry ones. Then they sat at the table and made the sign of the cross over their food and the farmer had the whole building sprinkled with holy water. The guests ate their food, and no one found fault with it even though Thorgunna had prepared it. They slept through the night and found the place very comfortable.

The next morning they prepared to go on with their journey and things went very smoothly for them, because wherever this news was heard, most people thought it advisable to show them whatever hospitality they required. From then on, their journey went without incident. (Quinn, V, 198-199)

I'm not suggesting that the saga writers made a systematic study of ancient Greek, but only seeking to remind the reader that Iceland was (and remains) a nation of story-tellers, and that extended residence in Byzantium would necessarily have exposed one to the Homeric stories. Also, as W. P. Ker so ably demonstrated over a century ago, the ancient Teutonic/Germanic traditions of epic heroism (and, indeed, of hospitality) reached an unbroken climax and culmination in Iceland in the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In other respects, the sagas and Homeric poems are utterly different, of course. The sagas are in prose, and are realistic and economical historical narrative, albeit rather dramatised at times. Homer's work is in poetry, which is exalted and rhetorical, the stories relying on the intervention of gods. That said, the similarities, particularly in terms of intention, of some subject matter and of scope and proportion, are striking.

### *Characterisation*

Another quality of saga style, unique in medieval European literature, is the presentation of character. Since the Elizabethan soliloquy, and the development of the novel in the eighteenth century, authorial claims of omniscience have been commonplace. Many are the plays and stories in our era that are solely to do with the examination of a character's thought processes in a relative absence of plot. It would never occur to a saga writer to describe what a character might be thinking. We see them in action; they are described to us as they are reported to have appeared to their contemporaries; we are told what they said to others in public. It is the plot, what happens, that is of most significance. This is not to say that character is unimportant in the sagas, but that the saga method suggests characterisation in a manner just as fresh and exciting as more recent, post-Cartesian methods. Also notable in the

saga style is that characters seldom change or develop. When they do, as in *Hrafnkel's Saga*, or *Hreidar's Tale*, it is worthy of remark.

I would like to suggest that at the heart of the saga prose style is what can usefully be seen to be something like an application of the principles of epic and tragedy outlined in Aristotle's *Poetics*. It is Chapter 6, "Tragedy Defined and Analyzed into Parts", which helps us to understand how saga narrative operates and, perhaps, some reason why they were composed. Aristotle identifies the six components of tragedy as plot, character, language, thought, spectacle and melody. Spectacle and melody are theatrical devices and needn't detain us here, but the ordering of plot and character must.

Plot and character. For tragedy is not an imitation of men but of action and life. It is in action that happiness and unhappiness are found, and the end we aim at is a kind of activity, not a quality; in accordance with their characters men are of such and such a quality, in accordance with their actions they are fortunate or the reverse. Consequently, it is not for the purpose of presenting their characters that the agents engage in action, but rather it is for the sake of their actions that they take on the characters they have. Thus, what happens—that is, the plot—is the end for which a tragedy exists, and the end or purpose is the most important thing of all. What is more, without action there could not be a tragedy, but there could be without characterization... Clearly, then, the first principle and, as it were, the soul of tragedy is the plot, and second in importance is character.

Plot, therefore, is the pinnacle and the end. The imitation is of events and actions. We can understand character only in and through action. We may but speculate about what they think. Principal characters in the sagas are usually described once and briefly, almost in cameo. We first meet Egil when he is three:

As he grew up, it soon became clear he would turn out very ugly and resemble his father, with black hair. When he was three years old, he was as big and strong as a boy of six or seven. He became talkative at an early age and had a gift for words, but tended to be difficult to deal with in his games with other children.

That spring Yngvar visited Borg to invite Skallagrim out to a feast at his farm, saying that his daughter Bera and her son Thorolf should join them as well, together with anyone else that she and Skallagrim wanted to bring along. Once Skallagrim had promised to go, Yngvar returned home to prepare the feast and brew the ale.

When the time came for Skallagrim and Bera to go to the feast, Thorolf and the farmhands got ready as well; there were fifteen in the party in all.

Egil told his father that he wanted to go with them.

"They're just as much my relatives as Thorolf's," he said.

"You're not going," said Skallagrim, "because you don't know how to behave where there's heavy drinking. You're enough trouble when you're sober."

(Scudder, I, 68)

Egil grows up, ages, loses his hair and, finally, his sight, but as a character, he is much the same at eighty as he was at three. Another useful example is the opening paragraph of *Olkofri's Saga*:

Thorhall was the name of a man who lived at Thorhallstadir in Blaskogar. He was wealthy and getting on in years when this story took place. Small and ugly, he was a man of no great prowess, but he had a knack with iron and wood. He had a profitable business supplying ale at the Thing, and through this business he soon got to be on speaking terms with all the great men, because they bought most of the ale. As often happens, the ale was not always liked and thus neither were the men who sold it. No one called Thorhall a generous man; he was, in fact, rather stingy. His eyesight was poor. It was his frequent custom to wear a hood; at the Thing he wore it always, and since he was a man whose name was not well-known, the thingmen gave him a name that stuck: they called him Ale-hood.

(Tucker, V, 231)

The story of Ale-hood is one of several very fine comedies in the canon. In an unfortunate accident when making charcoal, Ale-hood burns up a woods belonging jointly to six powerful Godi. They decide to prosecute and have him outlawed. His case is taken up by Broddi who proceeds to humiliate the Godi one by one and to save Ale-hood's miserable skin. It is the action, the give and take, the insults that inform the saga. Character, Ale-hood's especially, adds to the fun but is so clearly secondary that at the end of the third chapter the saga-man informs us quite bluntly that "Ale-hood is now out of the story."

One of the Godi dealt with so peremptorily by Broddi is Snorri Thorgrimsson. He appears in eleven sagas but features most prominently in *The Saga of the People of Eyri*. The subtleties of the saga method of characterization and the invitation to the reader or listener to construct and second-guess are given brilliant exposition here:

Snorri was a man of medium height but rather thin, and he was handsome, with regular features and fair skin. His hair was red-gold and his beard red. He was usually an even-tempered man, and did not readily show his likes and dislikes. Snorri was a wise man and had foresight about many things, a long memory and a disposition to vengeance. He gave good counsel but his enemies felt the chill of his strategies. He maintained the temple and was therefore known as Snorri the Godi.

(Quinn, V, 141)

After this we see him in action, listen to the words he speaks, or hear reports about him. Never would it occur to the saga writer to presume to guess what Snorri might be thinking. That, of course, is left to us, and is one source of real delight in the saga style. An episode later in the saga demonstrates the effect of the technique at its best. Styr Thorgrimsson finds himself lumbered with Halli and Leiknir, two Swedish berserks who had been gifts to Vermund from Earl Hakon Sigurdsson of Lade. Halli falls in love with Styr's daughter Asdis and want to marry her—very much to Styr's horror. Styr rides over to Snorri's farm at Helgafell to seek advice:

When he arrived Snorri invited him to stay but Styr said he just wanted to have a talk and then ride home. Snorri asked whether it was a difficult problem he wanted to discuss.

"It seems like one to me," Styr replied.

"Then let's walk up onto Helgafell (Holy Mountain)," said Snorri. "Plans made there have less of a chance of coming to nothing."

"Whatever you think," said Styr.

They walked up onto the mountain and sat there talking right up until evening. No one knew what they were talking about. Then Styr rode home.

(Quinn, V, 163)

Soon after, the berserks are treacherously slaughtered, after having been tricked into doing an enormous amount of work:

When Snorri the Godi heard about this he rode over to Hraun where he and Styr spent the whole day talking together. The upshot of their conversation was that Styr betrothed his daughter, Asdis, to Snorri the Godi, and the wedding took place the next autumn.

(Quinn, V, 165)

We are left to reconstruct the conversations and to imagine the intrigues and thoughts of Snorri and Styr. The berserks are safely out of the way, there is a useful road through the lava field (still called the *berserkjahraun*), Styr is freed from further threat, and Snorri gets the girl! The source of the interest and delight in such a passage, and it is typical, is from the application of principles which are remarkably similar to those articulated by Aristotle. I don't suppose the saga writers were scholars of Aristotle but their methods of narration are similar enough to remind me of Pope's couplet in *Essay on Criticism*: "Those rules of old discover'd, not devised/ Are Nature still, but Nature methodised" (lines 88/89).

The experience of reading through the entire canon is that of meeting a large proportion of the population of Iceland over nearly three centuries. From a literary point of view most are but names and have no further significance. Many characters, however, appear in more than one saga—well over seven hundred, in fact—and some in many. Gudmund Eyolfsson the Powerful appears in eighteen sagas, Snorri Thorgrímsson the Godi in eleven, Olaf Hoskuldsson the Peacock in eight, Hakon Sigurdsson the Powerful, Earl of Lade, in twenty. The effect, finally, is of reading one extended work of epic proportion and intention in which we see any number of characters from a multiplicity of perspectives. At modern parallel might be seen in the Yoknapatawpha County novels and stories of William Faulkner.

In his acceptance speech for the 1995 Nordic Prize for Literature for *Angels of the Universe*, Einar Már Guðmundsson places Northern literature at the heart of European culture. He reminds us of the words of Homer at the start of *Odyssey*:

Tell me Muse, of the man of many ways, who was driven  
Far journeys, after he had sacked Troy's sacred citadel.  
Many were they whose cities he saw, whose minds he learned of...

Today, in an age of media and the technological, the European Muse has come to appear as a passive newsreader. In storytelling through the centuries, man stands against the superpower. "The art of storytelling and literature are the point in the world where we stand and say: 'Nothing human does not touch me.'" The news and media show us the superpower only in terms of its weapons, wars and economic statistics. They fail to show "the kiss which appears in the foreverness, of the corner of the eye which says it all." Contemporary Icelandic is little changed from the Old Norse of a thousand years ago. Icelandic writers work within an unbroken literary and linguistic tradition extending back at least to the early ninth century, and especially the Settlement years from 874 to 930. Einar Már's contention is that the core of European culture has to do with an unbroken tradition of storytelling and poetry fostered by twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth century writers in Iceland, themselves aware of the literary and cultural traditions of Northern Europe extending back to "Troy's sacred citadel." Moreover, it is certainly more important than any E. U. trade agreement. The 'romance' of tariffs and meetings in glass buildings, like the media, are imaginatively poor in any comparison. Tons of fish and vegetables rolled along

the agreement table and nations put into statistical tables are transient and ephemeral. Iceland's literary culture remains buoyant and true. It stands like a rock in the ocean. Its memory is long. "In literature there are only a few steps between the centuries. The past is no further away than the hairdresser on the corner."

## NOTES

1. *Burnt Njal*, Edinburgh, 1861, and *Gisli The Outlaw*, Edinburgh, 1866, by Dasent; *Saga Of Viga-Glum*, London, 1866, by Sir E. Head; *Saga Of Gunnlaug The Worm Tongue*, "The Fortnightly Review", London, 1869, by Eirikr Magnusson and William Morris; *The Saga Of Grettir The Strong, The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs*, London, 1869, by Magnusson and Morris; *Laxdæla Saga*, London, 1899, by Muriel Press. Guðbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell, *CORPUS POETICUM BOREALE: The Poetry of the Old Northern Tongue – from the earliest times to the thirteenth century*, Oxford, 1883 (reissued in New York: Russell & Russell, 1965); W.P. Ker, *Epic and Romance: Essays on Medieval Literature*, Oxford, 1898 (reissued in New York: Dover Publications, 1957).

2. Jesse Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic Saga*, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1982 and William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking—Feud, Law and Society in Saga Iceland*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

3. *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders including 49 tales (Sagas of Icelanders)*, 30 translators; general editor: Viðar Hreinsson. Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson Publishing, 1997. 5 volumes.

4. Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, translated by Jean Young, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954: 26 ff. W. P. Ker is very interesting on this matter in Chapter 1 of *Epic and Romance*.

5. Aristotle, *Poetics*, translated by James Hutton. New York and London: Norton and Company, 1982.

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# Ethnic Persistence and Presence: Some Norwegian Sightings in British Columbia\*

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper discusses the low profile of Norwegians in British Columbia but argues that there is evidence to suggest that greater recognition is warranted. There is a focus on resurgent fraternalism and on accounts of significant personal achievements which have been largely overlooked or ignored. Finally, this paper points to additional research needed, particularly on the role of women and on church records to give a more complete history of this ethnic group.

**RÉSUMÉ:** Les Norvégiens de la Colombie-Britannique sont peu reconnus en société. Ceci reste vrai malgré la réapparition d'un certain fraternalisme chez les Norvégiens colombiens, et en dépit de l'impact des réussites remportées récemment par la population norvégienne. Il faudra des recherches systématiques pour mieux saisir le rôle crucial des femmes et la fonction de l'église dans l'histoire générale de ce groupe.

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A cursory glance at contemporary British Columbia society reveals a diverse population, often too readily focussed on the newer, more visible immigrant communities in the province. Clearly, such a view tends to overlook or obscure the identities of many groups, especially those held to be fully assimilated into or holding values congruent to those espoused by the host society. Among the latter groups, Scandinavians—Swedes, Danes, or Norwegians—may well be those most difficult to detect. Apart from the occasional sightings in conjunction with national day celebrations or particular ethnic festivals, there appears to be little evidence of their presence. In what follows I will attempt to show that Norwegians have as a minor ethnic/immigrant group been

recognized and made some impact on the provincial scene. The evidence cited will point to both signs of cultural persistence and individual achievements of some significance. Overall, the intent is to point the way to further research and to mark out areas that need further scholarly attention.

Most British Columbians, and Canadians for that matter, might be hard pressed to identify Norwegians in their midst, much less see anything particularly related to them as a group. However, it might be argued that Canadians, for example, saw in the highly visible 1994 Lillehammer Olympic celebration a distinctly Norwegian cultural pageant and a winter sport spectacle with some relevance to Canada and British Columbia. As a northern country conditioned to winter activities, we could relate to Norwegian triumphs in cross-country skiing and speed skating. Similarly, Norway's exploits at Nagano heightened awareness and injected not a little ethnic pride among the province's Norwegian community, some of which no doubt was shared by others. At any rate, one can generalize to this extent about Norwegians in the province: immigrants from Norway have left their mark on the landscape for over a century in such diverse settlements as Bella Coola, Prince Rupert, Wells, and Revelstoke. Furthermore, their fraternal associations have endured and flourished over the same period. For example, in June 1994, a record number of fraternal lodges of the Sons of Norway held their convention in Bella Coola, an occasion to commemorate the centennial of Christian Saugstad's pioneer colonization venture and to pay homage to the cultural traditions and heritage that have survived the passage of time.<sup>1</sup>

In what follows I will look in more detail at the early settlements but intend to focus as well on other facets of the Norwegian experiences in the province. While one cannot speak of large, identifiable communities of Norwegians, it is possible to take note of singular influences in specific industries, of fraternal and ethnic organizations, and of some individual achievements, that collectively document a viable Norwegian presence in British Columbia. On occasion, it can be a statement by immigrants themselves that can be illustrative, perhaps capturing what they saw as the essence of their experience. For example, when Hjalmar Rusthage had an interview reported in the *Lillehammer Tilskuer* on December 23, 1969 (p. 6), this is how he summed up his life and work:

Jeg kom fra Ruste paa Vinstra i 1922. Jeg var en halvtullede gudbrandsdøler som kunne gjøre litt av hvert, så må si at det har ikke blitt neget arbeidsløshet for

meg; siden jeg kom ut av RCAF i 1945 har jeg for det meste contacteret i nye grubeanlegg i B. C. og Yukon, og måtte således reise en gjennomsnitt 60 tusen mil med bil og fly hvert år.

[I came from Ruste near Vinstra in 1922. I was one of those half-crazy types from Gudbrandsdal who could do a little bit of everything, so have to say I was never too short of work; since my discharge from the RCAF in 1945 I have been mainly doing contract work for new mines in B. C. and Yukon and of necessity have had to travel some 60 thousand miles each year.]<sup>2</sup>

It is well to remember that Norwegians have never constituted more than a small percentage of the population. For example, when the first issue of the Norwegian language *Canada-Skandinaven* was published in 1911 in Vancouver, there were just over 3,500 immigrants from Norway in the province. By 1921, this total had increased to 6,570. The period from 1920 to 1930 saw by far the largest exodus from Norway, including some 20,000 coming to British Columbia. Still, by 1991 there were fewer than 22,000 who claimed to be Norwegian-born. For the four decades ending in 1990 there were fewer than 13,000 who came to Canada as a whole and possibly half of these settled in the Pacific province. Currently, some 31,000 first and second-generation Norwegians live in the greater Vancouver metro area (an area with a population well over one million); they have no well-defined residential grouping. Thus, the pattern of scattered settlement of Norwegians has hardly changed from the time of the 1921 census. At that time, more Norwegians—1,162—lived in the vast Skeena electoral district than in any other region of the province. The fact that ethnic organizations grew at all and that the number of fraternal associations now stands at an all time high is possible testimony or evidence of an unusually vigorous cultural self-confidence.<sup>3</sup>

Confidence, optimism, and determination were obviously qualities that Pastor Christian Saugstad brought to the founding of the Bella Coola settlement one hundred years ago. A native of Ringsaker, Saugstad had initially settled in Coon Prairie, Wisconsin, and later had a pastorate in Crookston, Minnesota. It was from there that he left to scout the Bella Coola region and eventually organized the first substantial Norwegian immigration venture to the province. Located on the coastal inside passage some 400 miles from the nearest city, the site was far from ideal. However, it was the isolation that had some appeal since the group wished to seek out a place where particular values—moral uprightness, integrity, an abstemious lifestyle, and probity—might be pro-

tected from the baleful influences of a more secular society. In fact, the Norwegian venture had much in common with similar utopian enterprises initiated by Danes at Cape Scott on the northern tip of Vancouver Island and the Sointula experiment by Finnish immigrants on Malcolm Island, off the northeast coast of Vancouver Island.<sup>4</sup>

Today, this original Norwegian settlement numbers some 2,500 of whom one-third are descended from the pioneers. Among them was the late Eric Hammer, son of Albert and Edel Hammer. His career in Bella Coola typified the lives of those who remained. Hammer became a director of the local Board of Trade and founder of the most progressive sawmill operation in the valley. He was among those who agitated for the construction of a road link to the interior some 60 years after the colony was founded. As a charter member of the Sons of Norway Skjonnedal Lodge 142, Hammer urged the residents to recall their links to the Old Country and to honour the Norwegian connection to their town. It was that kind of initiative which persuaded people to preserve the Andrew Svisdahl log home. It now rests on the site of the Augsburg Lutheran Church, both visible daily reminders of the Norwegian legacy in this area (*The Leiflette*, October 1991, p. 4).<sup>5</sup> The Bella Coola venture remains something of an anomaly in the immigration accounts in the province but will always be associated with Norwegian enterprise and adventure in British Columbia.

That the Norwegians were drawn to the coastal regions of the province was perhaps logical, given the seafaring traditions and maritime enterprise in their homeland. If we look at experiences of some immigrants in both the fishing industry and related port activities, we find evidence of a substantial impact. Among the hundreds who made their homes along the coast, from New Westminster to Ocean Falls and Prince Rupert, the lives of Leif Nordahl from Oslo, Hitra native Elias Kristoffer Skog, Winnipeg-born Harold Christenson (son of Norwegian immigrants), and Malvin Mjos and Odd Gronnerud from Bergen, are illustrative to some degree. Their exploits may not seem spectacular or dramatic but can give a perspective on what these added to the larger history of the province.

Elias Skog came to Prince Rupert as a twenty-seven year old in 1922, joining other immigrants from Hitra who had already started in the fishing industry. For the next two decades, he operated a seine boat—*Anna S*—in that area before relocating in New Westminster. When he passed away at 87 in Normanna, a rest home initiated by Nor-

wegians, he had been working in fishing for a half-century. His last boat, the *Western Star*, was also called the *Western Skog* attesting to his stature and respect within the fishermen's fraternity (*Vancouver Province*, October 13, 1973, p. 5). Among his compatriots in Prince Rupert were many other Norwegians with family traditions of going to sea. Melvin Hokestad's father was born in Steigen where he and his father had been fishermen. Martin Eriksen from Kabelvåg in Nordland also carried on in his father's footsteps and Bernhof Pedersen, who had been educated in Trondheim's *handelsgymnasium*, came to try his hand at the same trade because of the poor economy in Norway. However, he found that times could also be difficult in the New World:

It was hard times in the 30s and there were many problems. There was enough fish but you can imagine how it was when you had to take 25 cents for a single halibut.... For a large salmon we four cents a pound. It was these kind of conditions that made the fishermen get together to start a cooperative.

(*Norrøna*, December 1, 1975, p. 6)<sup>6</sup>

The Prince Rupert Fishermen's Cooperative became in time one of the largest in Canada and it is accurate to say that Norwegian immigrants played a major role in its success.

Success came as well to other enterprising newcomers such as Malvin Mjos. He came from Bergen in 1926 and according to one account it was through "... sheer hard work and native ability [that] he soon gained a reputation as one of the finest fishermen on the coast." In 1956 he built the *Silver Viking*, a 76 foot combined seiner-packer, it was the first ship on the coast fitted with a brine tank system devised by the Fisheries Research Board. When his first seiner was taken over by the Department of Fisheries for research, Mjos built the *Silver Viking II*, forerunner of a series of steel seiners which "... changed the history of fishing on the coast" (*Norrøna*, December 1, 1975, p. 4).

Along with technological changes in the fishing industry, there were advances in working conditions and the development of supporting agencies. Once more, we find evidence that Norwegian immigrants played an important part in the evolution that took place. When Leif Nordahl retired some twenty years ago, he had spent five decades along the coast, from green deckhand to towboat operator, skipper, and long time union organizer. Born in Oslo in 1898, Nordahl immigrated to Canada in 1926. His early experiences included farm work in Saskatchewan and a short-lived job in Victoria's famed Empress Hotel. In

1928, he signed on with a Norwegian skipper and five years later, he became a charter member of the Fishermen and Cannery Workers Industrial Union of Canada. Later he was instrumental in organizing the Salmon Purse Seiners Union. These two unions became one as the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union (UFAWU). Nordahl held card #7, a fact that points to his life-long and hard fought campaign for fair wages and prices in the industry. He served as a delegate every year from 1948 to 1973 and was on the union's board of directors (*Norrøna*, April 1, 1975, p. 5).

Nordahl's view that the general economic health of the industry had to be shared was shared among most fishermen. When the Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-op founded its own marine insurance company, the objective was to provide low cost service to the fishermen. From modest beginnings in 1945, the Pacific Coast Fishermen's Mutual Marine Insurance Company expanded to cover over 1,500 boats and some \$100 million worth of insurance in force thirty years later. Harold Christenson, and after him Arne Sorbo, were two Norwegians most responsible for the success of this venture. As Christenson noted "... we took the mystery out of marine insurance. Our company is owned by independent fishermen and they absorb the profit and loss. Nowhere else on the Pacific coast has a mutual insurance plan for fishing boats proved profitable" (*Vancouver Province*, December 14, 1976, p. 17). Well before Christenson's time, however, other Norwegians had become spokesmen for their countrymen in the fishing industry and elsewhere. Johan Dybhavn's role in the early years in Prince Rupert indicates a commitment not unlike Nordahl's or Christenson's when it came to the welfare of the newcomers.

Dybhavn had a varied background, which was reflected in many of his activities in Prince Rupert. Born in Borgrund, Sondmore, in 1879, he graduated from Bergen's military academy in 1897. He was active in Aalesund's business and social organizations before immigrating to Seattle in 1907. He later moved to Prince Rupert to take on contract work for the Grand Trunk Railway. Concurrently he enrolled in correspondence courses for insurance and real estate before establishing his own business in 1910. Subsequently, he formed a partnership with Olof Hansen, first Swedish-born Member of Parliament in Ottawa. He was also the first Norwegian-born to win an aldermanic seat in Prince Rupert and he became the acknowledged spokesman for the fishing industry, as well as the prime mover in the founding of the Sons of Norway Vinland



Lodge in 1910. He was named to the Order of St. Olav and appointed vice-counsel in recognition of his leadership among Norwegians and other Scandinavians in the Prince Rupert area (*Canada-Skandinaven*, April 15, 1914, p. 6).<sup>7</sup>

In more recent times, we have been reminded again of the close association of Norwegians with the Pacific coast fishing industry. A very new immigrant to the province, Jan Silden, president of O. Mustad & Son, came to Halifax in 1979 to oversee the Canadian subsidiary of this venerable Norwegian firm. Silden, who hails from Maaloy, moved to British Columbia in 1992 and has been active in a number of Norwegian-Canadian social groups and has also been a strong proponent of the newly established Scandinavian Centre in Burnaby. In many ways, Jan Silden is representative of the new immigrant: highly educated and technically attuned to the times but still taking an opportunity to represent the Norwegian presence in the province (*The West Coast Norwegian* 2, no. 4, November 1993, p. 8).

From the earliest days of the century to the present, there have been newcomers who wanted very much to keep the links to Norwegian traditions and heritage as part of their lives. In a sense, their "visibility" depended to a large degree on the extent to which these links were maintained. Their desire was manifested in a number of ways, not least of which was in the special ethnic or fraternal social groupings. While it is true that only a minority of those identified as Norwegian (including the second or third generations) became active members of fraternal organizations, most recognized the worth of the associations. When the *Western Viking* marked the death of Tormod Rekdal under the headline *En Hedersman i Canada Død*, hundreds of Norwegian-Canadians throughout the province were reminded of his service to their communities and of what the loss of his presence meant. For a half century, Rekdal was "Mr. Sons of Norway", the spokesman for ethnic fraternalism and of the heritage which Norwegians shared. Rekdal was born in Fiksdal in Romsdal in 1910 and came to British Columbia in 1927 to join his father. As many young immigrants did, Tormod worked at a succession of jobs from fishing to trapping, logging, and construction before securing more permanent work with the Great Northern Railway. After taking early retirement in 1958, he built a new career as the regional manager of the Sons of Norway insurance division, a position that saw him travel throughout the Pacific Northwest, including many small towns in the province's interior.

In this role, Rekdal was instrumental in the formation of many new lodges in British Columbia. Sleipner Lodge #8 had been chartered in Vancouver in 1910 but it was under Rekdal's four terms as its president that fraternalism flourished. It was said of him (*Norrønna*, September 1, 1989, p. 8): "han hadde mange egenskaper som unge emigranter satte pris paa." [He had many qualities that the young immigrants valued very highly.] He was the prime mover behind the Sleipner Ski Club, manager of the soccer team, and charter founding member of the hugely successful Torskeklubben, a social venue that emphasized Old Country cultural values. In addition, it was Rekdal's initiative that led to the setting up of academic scholarship funds under the Sons of Norway Foundation to encourage the promotion of the heritage in the province. In recognition of Rekdal's work, the Norwegian government awarded him the St. Olav's medal in 1975.<sup>8</sup>

Lodge activities are perhaps an unreliable reflection of the Norwegian presence in the province. Nonetheless, the existence of ethnic fraternal societies served to inform the larger community about the Norwegian element in their midst. The first of some two dozen lodges, Sleipner in Vancouver and Varden in New Westminster, were chartered in 1910 and 1911 respectively and continue today to have substantial membership totals. Despite the low level of post-World War II immigration from Norway, lodge growth has been remarkable in some localities. As well, the range of projects undertaken in the same period has been noteworthy. A look at Hardanger in Kelowna, Vinland in Prince Rupert, Leif Eriksen in Kamloops or Nordic in Castlegar, reveals many examples of commitment to and sharing of the Norwegian heritage and cultural values. For example, under the leadership of Levi Hestdalen, Hardanger Lodge in Kelowna initiated a series of Norwegian language courses, set up a Nordic ski club, gave lessons in *rosemaling* and Old Country folk dancing, and cooperated with the local CNIB (Canadian Institute for the Blind) to offer a "Ski for Light" program, based on Erling Stordahl's Beitostølen model in Norway. To many in the Okanagan region, the sum of these activities as well as the annual *syttende mai* festivities (Norway's Constitution Day, May 17, 1814), served to highlight the actual presence of Norwegian-Canadians in their locality.<sup>9</sup>

In a place such as Prince Rupert with a substantial Norwegian immigrant population, there was little question that a Sons of Norway lodge would be welcome. Vinland's charter came in 1930 and the roster of founding members has the unmistakable sound of Norway: Skog,

Caspersen, Dyrmdal, Sather, Myrvold and Storseth, to name a few. In the 1930s the members built a ski cabin and staged the first cross-country ski race on local Mount Oldfield. The lodge established a "Help Norway Committee" during the war years and was the principal sponsor for a city-wide civic centre project for the military and civilian population. In 1970, when the city held its 60th jubilee of incorporation, it was the Vinland Lodge and the Sonja ladies auxiliary who were joint hosts for the occasion. In short, Prince Rupert's history has been very closely linked to that of the Norwegian immigrants, both with respect to the fishing industry and through their fraternal associations (Fossum 1988, 26–29).

The work of Tormod Rekdal in the cause of ethnic / fraternal organization among Norwegians in the province has been noted. On occasion enthusiastic members such as Gunnar Selvig who left the Vinland Lodge for work in the Castlegar pulp mill aided his efforts. His efforts resulted in the charter for the Nordic Lodge and as its first president, he extended its scope in the 1960s to recruit members from Nelson, Trail, Rossland and other locations in the Kootenays. Nordic Lodge members hosted Erling Stordahl in 1978 when Ivar Reinsbakken and Annar Jacobsen staged a "Ski for Light" event as a prelude to the official launch of the Ski for Light Canada Association. As was the case with other lodges, Nordic of Castlegar revived tour skiing in a big way. Old time skiers and recent champions such as Ole Gundersen, Conrad Brattebo, and Ivar Reinsbakken did much to popularize a Norwegian tradition in a new setting, an activity that invoked memories of the 1930s when only a handful of Norwegians and Swedes skied in the area. Incidentally, this lodge provided a new kind of link between the province and Norway when Arne Reinsbakken, recipient of a Scandinavian Businessmen's Association scholarship transferred from the University of British Columbia to Trondheim to complete doctoral studies in geology (Fossum 1988, 48–52).

It is probably fair to say that nowhere has the Norwegian presence in British Columbia been more recognized than in the sport of skiing. Historically this has been the case even if recognition never went beyond a few individual competitors. From the 1920s to the 1960s, long before the advent of mass participation in alpine and cross-country skiing, towns such as Revelstoke, Prince George, Wells, Princeton, or Nelson all had a uniquely Norwegian-inspired structure—a ski jumping hill, built by immigrants. The jump hills have long since disappeared but in

their heyday, they attracted thousands of spectators who had never witnessed such exploits on skis. There were scores of tournaments in the interwar period and Norwegian-born skiers dominated the entry lists and the trophy awards. Many names—Kaldahl, Engstad, Mobraaten, Sotvedt, and Sandnes—are the stuff of legends in the ski history of the west (Dahlie 1990 and 1991).

For British Columbians in particular, it was the feats of a trio from Kongsberg popularly known as “The Three Musketeers” who gave Norwegian identity to the sport. Nordahl Kaldahl, Henry Sotvedt, and Tom [Tormod] Mobraaten were boyhood acquaintances from the Kongsberg area who emigrated in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In Norway, Sotvedt and Mobraaten belonged to the Sagrenna club and Kaldahl was a member of KIF (*Kongsberg Idretts Forbund*), home club of the famed Ruud brothers, Birger and Sigmund. In British Columbia, these young skiers had much in common with other immigrants, working variously in fishing, logging, and mining enterprises and subject to much travel and relocation throughout the province. Sotvedt spent many years in the Caribou region and was among a number of Norwegians who put Wells and Barkerville on the ski map in the 1930s. There he met up again with Kaldahl and the Brandvold brothers from Gudbrandsdal as well as another skier of note, Kaare Hegseth. Together they built the jumping hills and organized the provincial Nordic championships in Wells. Later, Sotvedt moved to Vancouver where along with Mobraaten and Kaldahl he would be featured in all the major ski tournaments in the Pacific Northwest from the 1930s to the 1960s. The sport of ski jumping attracted thousands, not only in the Vancouver region, but east to Princeton and Revelstoke and south of the 49th parallel to Seattle, Spokane and Portland. The Norwegian-Canadian connection to the sport was underlined in the selection of Mobraaten to both the 1936 and 1948 Winter Olympic ski teams. When Sotvedt had finished his competitive career, he became a leading technical consultant and spokesman with the Canadian Amateur Ski Association. Sotvedt also served as manager of the 1964 Olympic ski team and as a delegate to the FIS (International Ski Federation). He was also the first Canadian to receive certification as a judge in international ski jumping. His compatriot, Mobraaten had the honour to represent Canada and the Norwegian-Canadians in Kongsberg, Norway in 1987 at the official opening of the ski museum. Among the splendid array of trophies on display were some of the

dozens of silver cups and medallions garnered by the Kongsberg trio in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>10</sup>

The identification of Norwegians and skiing in the province was manifested in other ways than competition alone. The Norwegian concept of skiing as a way of life to be enjoyed in a natural setting had its own appeal. For example, the opening up of the Diamond Head wilderness region in Garibaldi Park by Ottar and Emil Brandvold introduced many British Columbians to the Norwegians' own ideas. They brought with them something of the Old Country notion of an environmentally benign intrusion into nature. One could relate their building of a lodge in a mountain area far removed from urban society to the Norwegian *hytte* experience. For some thirty years, until the province closed the Diamond Head chalet in 1973, the Brandvolds catered to hundreds of people who came to enjoy back country skiing in a way familiar to Norwegians. Today when thousands participate in ski marathons throughout the province and take cross-country touring for granted, they may not recall the trail blazed by Norwegian and other Scandinavian immigrants. Still, there are reminders from time to time that the Norwegian connection to the sport is not entirely overlooked. Just recently the director of Cross-Country Canada issued a lifetime membership to Minn Sjölseth-Carter, a *nordmöring*, who has achieved national and international acclaim as an artist but equal fame in world masters' skiing. Sjölseth-Carter won gold medals in two of the world's historic ski marathons—the Birkebeiner in Norway and the Vassaloppet in Sweden. The citation to her reads (*The Kamloops Daily News*, March 17, 1993): "The dedication and commitment you show to the sport of cross-country skiing is an inspiration to [all] skiers..."<sup>11</sup>

With the relative ease of modern travel between Canada and Norway, it is not at all unusual for latter day immigrants to return "home" for periodic renewals of their cultural ties. Often such visits serve both to validate their decision to emigrate and to enhance their role as spokespersons for Norwegian-Canadian values. If people profess to see Norwegians in a pluralist society that defines British Columbia, it is likely to be through the actions of a number of individuals who interact successfully with the host society. It may be useful to look briefly at the exploits of some post-World War II immigrants to illustrate this point. The careers of Gunnar Warolin, Annar Jacobsen, and Einar Oddvar Fjeld were in no way similar, yet all could be seen as reflecting a muted Norwegian viewpoint while making a significant impact provincially.

Warolin was born in Oslo and came to the province in 1950 looking for anything that could provide a living. He worked as a jack-of-all-trades at Gold River, then operated on Front Street in New Westminster selling imported food products from Norway and other Scandinavian countries. Always cosmopolitan in his outlook, in 1970, Warolin turned his hand to editing *Norrøna*, the last Norwegian-language newspaper in Canada. This newspaper had a long history, having been founded in Winnipeg in 1910 by Peter Martin Dahl. It was published weekly until December 1984 when Warolin wrote his farewell editorial. For him, it had been a labour of love but it provided him with a twofold opportunity—to speak to and record the actions of Norwegians and to interpret their enterprise to others in the host society. He also used his position to promote fraternalism in many forms. In addition, Warolin served as the administrator of Normanna, a Burnaby rest home started on the initiative of Norwegian immigrants in the 1930s.<sup>12</sup> Incidentally, Normanna as of this writing is undergoing rebuilding as a state-of-the-art, multi-level care institution and it will stand over time as the biggest undertaking connected to Norwegians.

As for Einar Fjeld (Field, in the Anglicized version) who came to the province in 1957, it was the "... fin jakt og friluftsmulighetene..." [the great hunting and outdoor life possibilities] (*Samhold*, April 12, 1994) that first attracted him. In a few short years he was to become a central figure in B. C. Hydro, taking a major role in its "Power Smart" program, overseeing the rationalization of personnel when staff reductions became necessary, and instituting a new life style approach for the staff. Here he called upon his background in *Vestre Toten* as an enthusiastic skier and environmental activist. Just as Warolin did, Fjeld kept in close touch with the Old Country and still maintains his father's *gaard* Roseth in Sagvoll. In his Vernon headquarters, he is a respected consultant and a leader in the skiing activities of that region. In a sense, he represents a different type of immigrant, one who conspicuously brings the best of his own background to bear on his new surroundings but who at the same time eschews a narrow chauvinism. In fact, Fjeld typifies the Norwegian newcomer whose success has made him almost "invisible" to the host society, difficult to isolate if one is to look for an identifiable immigrant or ethnic presence (*Samhold*, April 12, 1994, p.12, and interview with S. Anderson, April 15, 1994).

Certainly, there are examples of immigrants who remain resolutely attached to the Old Country without prejudice to their loyalty to Canada.

These individuals find an outlet for action that incorporates values strongly held and nurtured. In the work that post-war immigrant Annar Jacobsen has done in the social arena, we see distinct Norwegian influences in evidence. Recently elected to the national presidency of Ski for Light Canada, Jacobsen has mirrored the values associated with the founding group in Beitostølen, Norway and those of the late leader, Erling Stordahl. Now the manager of the Norwegian-fashioned resort area at Hatzic, east of Vancouver, he pursued the extension of summer courses and activities that emphasize his heritage. As three times president of Sleipner Lodge, he was the chief promoter of the annual "Welcome to Norway" event, drawing hundreds of locals to the Scandinavian Centre with its visible display of Norwegian arts, crafts, and cuisine (*The Leiflette*, January 1998, p. 4).

The discussion to this point has suggested a rather muted and understated impact of Norwegians in British Columbia and one can cite additional examples to buttress that assessment. Whatever impression Norwegian immigrants made, it is generally not the case that their exploits are mentioned in the context of their origin. For example, the Lomex copper mine in the Highland Valley near Kamloops has been an exceptional success story, but few are informed about the life of the late Egil Lorntzen. The same might be said for Franz Wihelmsen of Whistler or mill operator Ivor Killy who made his mark in Prince George.

Not many Norwegian immigrants became millionaires in the province but Egil Lorntzen is a notable exception. Born on Andøya off the Norwegian north coast in 1908, Lorntzen had his early schooling in Tromsø and immigrated to Montreal in 1932. From there, he moved on to Prince Rupert to join the fishing fleet but then turned his interest to mineral exploration in 1934. It was to take two decades of prospecting throughout British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and as far afield as Dutch Guiana before his faith in the Highland Valley prospect was vindicated. "It was the happiest day of my life. It was the 13th of June, 1954 ... that day I made the great find" (*Norrøna*, February 15, 1971, p. 4) Thus, Lorntzen recalled the discovery that eventually made the Lomex mine a model for the industry. A lifetime member of the Norsemen's Federation [Nordmanns-Forbundet], Lorntzen was an honorary director of the Norwegian-Canadian Cultural Society and a major figure in the recent development of the Scandinavian Centre (*Norrøna*, February 15, 1971 and *Nordmanns-Forbundet Månedshäfte*, Volume 54, 1970).

Wilhelmsen and Killy each made notable achievements in their own areas as a summary of their careers suggests. Ivor Killy was born in Dovre and arrived in Canada as a sixteen-year-old in 1927. After work on his brother's farm in Alberta, Killy moved west, cutting ties and doing horse logging near the mining towns of Princeton and Copper Mountain. After moving to Prince George, he established one of the first modern sawmills in the region. Killy travelled back to Scandinavia on occasion to keep up to date on the latest in mill technology and it was said of him that he demonstrated a capacity to innovate. At his passing, a scholarship fund was established at the University of Northern British Columbia to mark his passion for education (*Vancouver Sun*, March 15, 1994, p. 18).

The relationship of Norwegians to skiing, especially as trail-breaking competitors has already been noted. Among those who worked behind the scenes to promote the concept of the modern ski resort, the name of Franz Wilhelmsen deserves special mention. Some have cited him as the "Father of Whistler" for his prescience in realizing the potential of Whistler Mountain in the 1960s. In the years leading up to the massive development, it was Wilhelmsen's promotional work and his enthusiasm for skiing which convinced others in the ski industry of the mountain's future. He kept in touch with both the FIS (International Ski Federation) and North American ski associations and worked particularly hard to keep provincial interests informed. Wilhelmsen was born in Norway in 1918, educated in Trondheim, and served in the Royal Guards Regiment prior to the war. After coming to Canada in 1940, he served in both the Norwegian Merchant Marine and the Royal Norwegian Air Force in Little Norway, near Toronto. After his discharge with the rank of lieutenant, he made his home in Vancouver and devoted his energies to Whistler. In 1997, he was inducted into the Canadian Ski Hall of Fame and, somewhat ironically, two days before his passing in April 1998, he was inducted into the B. C. Sports Hall of Fame and received the prestigious 1998 W. A. C. Bennett Award. All this in recognition of "... his remarkable career, a lifetime committed to skiing, a sport he loved..." (*Vancouver Sun*, May 2, 1998, p. 24).

The foregoing examination of the Norwegian presence in British Columbia is intended to be a starting point for further scholarly study. This paper has suggested that Norwegians have pretty well blended into the demographic mainstream of the province. Furthermore, it seems that the muted or understated presence of this minor ethnic group is itself a



reflection of the group's easy passage into a new society. The evidence of a pronounced fraternalism despite recent low immigration suggests ethnic persistence and a pride in their heritage, which may well point to more visibility in time. Additional research would have to take into account Norwegian women. While even more difficult to identify, examples such as Vivian [Haaheim] Bates, a longtime mainstay of Varden Lodge and Normanna, would be a good starting point.<sup>13</sup> In addition, local studies such as the recently published paper on the Trondheim Congregation indicate a fruitful avenue of investigation. In summary, the full account of Norwegians in British Columbia is still to be written. When it is, it will show that these immigrants brought with them values and a cultural tradition that served both themselves and the province well.<sup>14</sup>

## NOTES

\*An earlier version of this paper was presented at Stavanger, Norway in June 1994. I am pleased to acknowledge the helpful comments of readers and those of the editor.

1. For Bella Coola see Kenneth Bjork, "Bella Coola," in Harald Naess et al, eds. *America Norvegica*, vol. III (Oslo: Universitets Forlaget, 1971): 195-222. Other pertinent sources include: Gordon Fish, ed. *Dreams of Freedom: Bella Coola, Cape Scott, Sointula*. Sound Heritage Series (Victoria: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1982), which also deals with the Sointula and Cape Scott settlements; Liv Kennedy, "The Norwegians of Bella Coola," in *Viking*, vol. 87 (February 1990): 13-15, 27-29. A useful contemporary source is the Sons of Norway convention booklet, *14th Biennial Convention Centennial 1894-1994*, issued in June 1994 by Skjonnedal Lodge #7; this booklet contains Barry Brekke's "Bella Coola Highlights 1894-1954": 3-18.

2. Among others who wrote home of their experiences were White Rock settlers Ole and Ida Hansen who came in 1924, and Albert Traaseth who came to Surrey two years earlier. Traaseth remarked that after 47 years in British Columbia, he could not think of a better place to live. He noted that those of the first generation still celebrated Christmas as in Norway (*Lillehammer Tilskuer*, December 23, 1969: 6): "Vi feirer julen paa gammel norsk måte, med ganske stor selskapelighet. Her brukes lefse og kaker etter gamle norsk oppskrifter..." [We celebrate Christmas in the Norwegian fashion, with much hospitality. Here we make *lefse* and baked goods following the old Norwegian recipes...]

3. For population figures, see *Fifth Census of Canada*, 1911, Vol. II: Table xvii, 440–41; *Sixth Census of Canada*, Vol. 1: *Population*, Table 26: 380–81; and *Seventh Census of Canada*, 1931, Vol. II: *Population by Areas*, Table 31: 297.

4. For additional information on Bella Coola, see Ivar Fougner, "En normand som indianerhövding," in *Nordmanns-Forbundet Månedshäfte* IX (November, 1916), 609–615, *Canada-Skandinaven* (December 11, 1911) and *Norrøna* (November 15, 1975). Sointula was a Finnish settlement on Malcolm Island off the northeast coast of Vancouver Island. See Gordon Fish, ed. *Dreams of Freedom.: Bella Coola, Cape Scott, Sointula*. Sound Heritage Series (Victoria: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1982), and J. Donald Wilson. "'Never believe what you have never doubted': Matti Kurikka's Dream for a New World Utopia," in Michael G. Karni, ed. *Finnish Diaspora I: Canada, South America, Africa, Australia and Sweden* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1981): 131–53.

5. This publication is printed in Maple Ridge, B. C., by District #7, Sons of Norway.

6. Also see details in Gunnar Solum, "Norge i Amerika," *Namdal Arbeiderblad* (p. 7) for additional information on Norwegians in the Prince Rupert fishing industry.

7. See also, Peter Myrvold, "Norsk By ved Stillehavskysten," in *Nordmanns-Forbundet Månedshäfte* 32 (April 1939): 106–108.

8. *Norrøna* (September 1, 1989, p. 4) recounts full details of Rekdal's career and should be supplemented by *Viking* (April 1977): 6, for specific information on organizing work for the Sons of Norway.

9. For details see passim, Jack Fossum, ed. *Sons of Norway: A History of District # 7, British Columbia* (Campbell River, B. C.: Kask Graphics Ltd, 1988). But also see "Levi Hestdalen," in *Canadian Viking* (June 1974): 2–3.

10. Dahlie, 1990 and 1991, passim, but see also *Laagendalsposten* (Kongsberg) (May 13 and 14, 1987), 6–7, for a special mention of Mobraaten.

11. Dahlie, 1990 and 1991, passim, and also *Vancouver Sun* (May 25, 1972, April 8, 1973, and December 6, 1978). For Sjølseth-Carter see *The Kamloops Daily News* (March 12, 1993). Other senior skiers from the Norwegian community participated in the ski marathons, for example, Olve Punsvik, Paul Meidal, and Annar Jacobsen. See the account in *Norrøna* (March 15, 1984). On the alpine front newcomer Ornulf Johnsen took over the Grouse Mountain Ski School in 1965 and his account can be found in Kerry Banks "The Guru of Grouse," in *Sport'N Style* (Vancouver, September/October 1987) and in the *Vancouver Sun* (December 21, 1965).

12. Warolin's untimely passing in June 1966 was a great loss to the Norwegian community and was duly noted in Seattle's *Western Viking*, a Norwegian-language newspaper to which Warolin made regular contributions. The demise of *Norrøna*

meant that news of Norwegians in British Columbia was often overlooked. The Norwegian consul, Thomas Ronning in a column marking the end of *Norrøna* had this to say about "Storkaren fra *Norrøna*": "A kombinere detaljhandel i matvarer og senere bysterestillingen på Normanna Rest Home med alle stillingene som avisutgiver, —redaktør, —journalist, —trykker, —og annonseakkvisitor var ikke lett." [To combine the details of grocery handling and later the administrator's job at the Normanna Rest Home with all the positions as a newspaper publisher —editor, —journalist, —printer, —and seeking out advertising wasn't easy.] *Western Viking's* editor said that Gunnar was, "Mr. Norway of the North and was involved in anything and everything Norwegian." In his farewell editorial Warolin noted that (*Norrøna*, December 15, 1984: 3) "... Vi har også gjennom *Norrøna* hatt anledning til å møte mange kjente folk... Personlig har jeg hatt anledning til å hilse på politikere, fremstaende menn og kvinner i samfundet som mann ellers bare lese om." [We have also through *Norrøna* had the opprtunity to meet many well known people... Personally I have had the chance to meet politicians, exceptional men and women in society whom otherwise one just reads about.]

13. For Vivian [Haaheim] Bates and Anfinn Haaheim see *The Leiflette* (March 1988 and May 1977) which also includes a history of Varden Lodge.

14. Fred Braches, ed. *The Trondheim Congregation: The Norwegian Minute Books of the Lutherans in Whonnock* (Whonnock, B. C.: Whonnock Community Association, 1997) is a model of the kind of local detailed examination of early Norwegian settlement which needs to be undertaken.

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# The Politician Grundtvig (1783–1872): A Liberal in the Danish Constituent Assembly of 1849

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**ABSTRACT:** The Danish bishop N. F. S. Grundtvig is known as a poet, Danish nationalist, cleric and educator. In the latter role, he is considered the father of the "Folkehøjskole". This study focuses on his lesser known activity of politician in the Danish Constituent Assembly of 1848–49, where his liberal views led him to laud the contemporary British theorists on economics when the rights of individuals to poor relief was on the agenda in the assembly. By taking this line of political action, instead of choosing contemporary alternatives, Grundtvig contradicted his own views on true Christian behaviour. Because of these views on social issues, he alienated also a great many of the lower classes in Denmark, who then also turned from his general spiritual and religious views as well.

**RÉSUMÉ:** L'évêque danois N. F. S. Grundtvig est connu comme poète, nationaliste danois, prêtre et éducateur. Dans ce dernier rôle, il est considéré comme le père de la "Folkehøjskole". Cette étude se concentre sur son activité moins connue comme homme politique au sein de l'Assemblée constituante danoise de 1848–49, où ses vues libérales l'amènèrent à faire l'éloge des théoriciens économistes britanniques, ses contemporains, à un moment où les droits des individus à l'assistance aux pauvres figuraient à l'ordre du jour de l'Assemblée. En choisissant cette voie d'action politique, au lieu d'autres solutions contemporaines, Grundtvig contredit ses propres idées sur la véritable conduite chrétienne. À cause de ces vues sur les questions sociales, il s'aliéna une grande partie des classes inférieures danoises, qui se détournèrent également de ses conceptions générales sur les questions spirituelles et religieuses.

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The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Danish constitution was on June 5, 1999. It was signed by a reluctant king in the middle of a civil war,

marked by foreign intervention from the German powers, especially Prussia and Austria, at a time when there was social and political upheaval all over Europe. The new constitution replaced a benevolent absolutism that had prevailed since 1660. One hundred and fifty-two chosen men—114 of these had been elected by common suffrage by all independent males over 30 years of age—had deliberated for several months to reach agreement. Surprisingly, the most notable fact was that the constitution, in spite of the onslaught of ultraliberals, preserved the fundamental social obligations of the state towards the destitute that had prevailed during late absolutism. It was a narrow escape and the attack on these fundamental issues was rather amazingly carried out by Grundtvig and his followers.

### **General Background:**

#### **Grundtvig's life and its importance for the development of Danish society**

Generally, the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) and the writer Hans Christian Andersen (1805–75) are considered the two most outstanding (and in fact world renown) Danes in nineteenth-century Danish cultural life. However, it is equally true that Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783–1872) exerted the most marked influence on Danish society during the nineteenth century. He has continued to affect Denmark to this day. Yet, he is not widely known internationally, in spite of the efforts made by Denmark to have his name recognized abroad. Grundtvig was a cleric, historian, educator, politician, and writer. He was an individual with many ideas, not all of which were always mutually consistent. He was well known, as he was a very prolific writer on many very different topics. Thus, when the ideology of absolute monarchy was under pressure in Denmark from many directions, he was able to gather a rather diffuse following, mainly of clerics, but also of the more well-to-do bourgeois farmers who shared his views on spiritual and secular matters. The latter group had emerged as the leading social group in the still predominantly rural Danish society, thanks to the cumulative effects of the late eighteenth century's agrarian reforms.

Grundtvig's religious ideas, which developed and changed over time, were expressed in sermons (many of which were printed), in pamphlets, in books, and—above all—in hymns. He was greatly influenced by the Romantic Movement in vogue during this time; this showed itself in his writing of several works on world history, as well as Danish and



Nordic history. In addition, Old Norse mythology held his particular interest; one of his main endeavors were translations into Danish of the *Gesta Danorum*, written in Latin in the twelfth century by the Danish monk Saxo Grammaticus, and of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which related Nordic history and mythology.

As an educator, Grundtvig was an eager antagonist of the established grammar schools and of the obligatory Danish public school system, which, after it had been introduced into the feudal framework in 1739, became established in its contemporaneous form by the Danish public school law of 1814. He was against this "black" school system, which only educated and indoctrinated children in the spirit of "dead" languages. He felt that children should be educated in the living language, in order to be able to make existential decisions later on in life. Grundtvig's ideas on the principles of education became the inspiration that, in the 1850s, led to the establishment of an alternative, voluntary "Free-School" system and to the Danish *Folkehøjskole* "Folk High School." This was to be a place to which young adults came of their own free will, and where, in the company of their fellows and teachers, they could work together on the concerns of society and on whatever else they might agree to be appropriate. The *Folkehøjskole* was designed for the mutual good and was to be liberal and voluntary. It did not provide qualifications in the educational system as a whole, nor did it hold examinations.

When, as a result of the growing political tension between German- and Danish-speaking peoples in the Duchies of Schleswig-Holstein, nationalism began to develop in the 1830s, Grundtvig became, both in his speeches and in his writing, one of the foremost nationalistic leaders of the Danes. In 1848, Grundtvig could add the occupation of politician and parliamentarian to his list of activities. He served for most of 1848 to 1858 and again in 1866 as a member of the Danish Constituent Assembly and as a member of the Danish parliament.

Grundtvig's activities and influence were very impressive, but his life and personality were quite complex—as the author of the official Danish "fact sheet" about Grundtvig also has to admit:

When all is said and done, the whole of his life and fortunes present a huge paradox: during World War II and at other crucial times Grundtvig's hymns and songs have proved to be a vital means of support for the Danish people; but in his lifetime he experienced a reaction to his hymns that grew to be such a bone

of contention that in 1826 he retired from the ministry because he was forbidden to use them at church services. (Slumstrup 1993)

I agree with Grundtvig's importance for the cultural development in Denmark, and in Norway too, but to me Grundtvig's importance for Danish cultural development is a mixed blessing indeed. If, however, one is to fully understand Danish culture and history from the beginning of the nineteenth century until today, one has to concern oneself with Grundtvig.

### Research on Grundtvig

In the research on Grundtvig, the focus has mostly been on either religious matters—the literature, especially his hymns—or else on Grundtvig's ideas on popular education, with special reference to the *Folkehøjskole*.<sup>1</sup> As mentioned earlier, it is not possible to deal with a specific aspect of Grundtvig's activities without trying to relate that aspect to his general view of life. In summing up that general view, one can rely on a leading authority on Grundtvig, Kaj Thaning, whose doctoral thesis of 1963 was entitled: *Menneske først—Grundtvigs opgør med sig selv* [First, human—Grundtvig's encounter with himself].

In this work, Thaning stressed the final crystallization of Grundtvig's thinking, which he achieved in 1832, just after several crucial journeys to England in the years 1829–31. On the one hand, this final crystallization of thinking implied a sharp division between belief and rational thought, because Grundtvig had realized that human life had existed long before the Christian church. He also realized that the Church, as such, and the life led by Christian congregations had existed before the New Testament was established as the Holy Writ on which Christianity was to be based.

In accordance with this line of thought, humanity had had to form its own existence and had to learn to communicate and to think rationally long before the "Living Word" of Christian belief was brought to it by Jesus Christ and passed on in the "living" congregations across the generations up to the present. This "Living Word" had to be passed on up through history and had to persuade people to believe in God and affirm and confess their belief. A professing of belief brought with it real life and was, in itself, the "Living Word."

In order to understand how crucial the "Living Word" was and how true belief brought salvation, a human being had to be able to

communicate, analyze life and discern what the conditions of human life were before and after the advent of Christianity. Those conditions had shown themselves and defined themselves throughout history. In accordance with that view, Grundtvig formed his often-cited motto: "First, human; then, Christian."<sup>2</sup> That motto is not to be misunderstood as Grundtvig seeing human life as having the higher priority of the two, but it is meant to signify that in order for one to become a good and true Christian, it is necessary to be able to communicate and analyze life and, as mentioned earlier, to discern what the conditions of human life were before and after the advent of Christianity. In short, one had to be able to have access to education in a "school for life."<sup>3</sup>

Many scholars have commented on the political side of Grundtvig's life mainly basing their views on some of the previously mentioned aspects. However, only a few have focused on Grundtvig's political work and have tried to discuss the discrepancy between his social and economic views, on the one hand, and his views on religion and education, on the other.

In 1940, Poul Andersen published a book that partly dealt with Grundtvig as a parliamentarian. The focus of the book was directed toward what Grundtvig had actually achieved in the Constituent Assembly and in the 17 years thereafter in the two chambers of the *Rigsdag*. That achievement amounted to very little, other than in Church matters. Thus, even though Andersen mentions Grundtvig's views on social affairs, the emphasis is on Grundtvig's idealistic fight for democracy (though misunderstood during his lifetime), national identity, and the human rights of the individual in society.<sup>4</sup>

In 1954, F. C. Kålund-Jørgensen published an article on a very circumscribed topic; he concentrated on the paragraph in the Danish constitution dealing with the general school system. In this article, Grundtvig appears as only a minor participant in that debate (Kålund-Jørgensen 1954).

In 1955, the theologian Kaj Baagøe wrote about Grundtvig and English Liberalism. He stressed Grundtvig's liberal views on all economic and social matters, and acknowledged that those liberal views were much contested, then as well as later, even within the Grundtvigian movement. Although Baagøe underlines the strong connection between Grundtvig and English Liberalism, emphasis is put on the aspect of individual freedom (Baagøe 1955).

The year 1983, the bicentennial of Grundtvig's birth, saw the publication of several studies, including *Politikeren Grundtvig*, a very readable book by the politician and high-school teacher Poul Dam (Dam 1983). Since Dam based his book on existing secondary literature, but on almost no primary sources at all, it was possible for him to reflect only the general assessment of others of Grundtvig as a politician.

The same year also saw the publication of some rather critical newspaper articles and conference papers on Grundtvig's social and economic views (see Bekker-Nielsen 1986). In the wake of the celebration, in 1990, the historian Vagn Wåhlin published the only paper up to now offering a thorough discussion of those aspects of Grundtvig's points of view. However, Wåhlin still defends the main issue, the "brutality" of Grundtvig's social views, while stressing his humane and nationalistic characteristics (Wåhlin 1989/90).

The guideline for writers of these last interpretations was also Grundtvig's motto: "First, human; then, Christian." These writers have sympathetically stressed Grundtvig's views on individual freedom and liberty, to be exercised without any restraints from, or obligations towards, society. A voluntary benevolence towards the outcasts of society was what should characterize a true Christian citizen.<sup>5</sup>

It is a fact, however, that Grundtvig's ideas became the ideological foundation for the newly emerged bourgeois class of gentlemen farmers with large holdings, and for that class only (Zerlang 1976: especially 192 ff.). The emerging industrial labour class and the rural poor—smallholders, cottagers, and servants—had to look for other prophets.

In order to explain that fact and in order to obtain a more sober and realistic picture of Grundtvig's standing as humanitarian and humanist, one has to take a closer look at his performance as a politician. It is thought provoking and symptomatic of the bias of scholarship up to now that none of Grundtvig's political speeches in the Danish parliament has been printed in any edition of his works.<sup>6</sup>

I contend that an assessment of Grundtvig as a politician has to be done by looking at his performance as a politician, not just at his few somewhat successful actions, but also by looking at his reactions and speeches concerning matters on which the majority of parliamentarians disregarded his views. Further, it is necessary to interpret Grundtvig's political performance on its own merits and not on an 1832 theological

basis. As well, it is necessary to evaluate his performance in the light of debates and opinions of his time.

### **The Political Background, 1849**

A new king, Frederik VII, followed his father, Christian VIII, in late January 1848. Christian VIII had died unexpectedly amidst the ongoing process of changing the existing absolute monarchy into a constitutional monarchy, while preserving the order of society and the unity of state between the Kingdom of Denmark and the Duchies of Schleswig-Holstein-Lauenburg. That process had begun after several years of social unrest and threatened upheaval among the common people in the countryside, and after a realization of the fact that the then crown prince, who was an only child, would not be able to produce any offspring. If the crown prince died without offspring, different rules of succession would apply for Denmark, Lauenburg, and a part of Schleswig, on the one hand, and for Holstein and another part of Schleswig, on the other.

Subsequent to pressure from the National Liberal bourgeois leaders, a new government was appointed on March 21, 1848, and the new king, Frederik VII, declared that for the future he would consider himself to be a constitutional monarch (Engelstoft 1949: 13 ff.). The new government and its nationalistic politics again provoked a Schleswig-Holstein rebellion (Vammen 1988). So, the government had to deal with an uprising supported by Prussia; it had to deal with the growing social discontent in the Danish population, which had helped it into power; and then, since the king was going to consider himself to be a constitutional monarch, it had to draw up the lacking constitution.

In order to conceive the new constitution, the government decided to create a Constituent Assembly for both the Kingdom of Denmark and the Duchy of Schleswig. The Danish part of the assembly was to consist of 152 members in total, 38 of whom were to be appointed by the king and 114 of whom were to be directly elected in single constituencies of approximately 12,000 inhabitants. Voters were all capable men who were at least thirty years old, had been living in their constituencies for at least one year, were the heads of households, and had enrolled themselves on the local lists of the electorate. The election law was put before the two existing advisory Assemblies of Estates in Denmark and approved and promulgated by them on July 6, 1848. The election itself took place October 5, 1848. Thirty-three percent of the electorate in Denmark actually voted, but as the Duchy of Schleswig was in the

hands of rebels, the members intended for the Constituent Assembly from the duchy were never elected or appointed. That rump parliament assembled on October 23, 1848 to consider the future constitution (Engelstoft 1949: 11–40).

In the meantime, the government had discussed the content of the proposed constitution. D. G. Monrad had composed the first draft for an internal [interim] government committee; it was radicalized by Orla Lehmann, the instigator of the revolution and then a member of the government; and, in the final debate in the plenum of government, it was modified by the other government members (Møller 1949: 41–94). This governmental draft of a constitution, which was presented to the assembly on October 24, 1848, determined the ramifications of the coming debate (*Beretning* 1848–1849: 32–45).

First, the assembly had to decide on the rules for its own proceedings, and then it had to function as a forum for debate on the actual politics of the government. However, the situation of war had become so pressing for the government that the opening debate on the constitution in the plenum of the assembly had to wait until December 1848 (Neergaard 1892: 376–444). After the opening debate, a committee of 17 was elected to examine the government proposal and report back to the assembly. Grundtvig was not a member of this committee (*Beretning* 1848–1849: 576 ff.).

The draft of the constitution consisted of 80 articles divided into eight chapters. Chapters one through six and chapter eight were returned from the committee on February 22, 1849; and chapter seven, which relates to the matter of civil rights—including article 70 on the right to poor relief—was returned on March 26, 1849 for a provisional debate (*Beretning* 1848–1849: 2165–2180; 2506–2696).

The committee suggested several revisions to the government's draft, and though in most cases it had been unable to establish majority opinions, it furnished several minority suggestions on each matter at hand. The situation had been complicated by the fact that a new government had taken over in November 1848. D. G. Monrad and Orla Lehman, who had been the leading persons regarding the constitutional matter in the former government, no longer held office and were not members of the assembly. Furthermore, the new government members did not feel deeply dedicated to approving the proposed draft from the former government and publicly announced this to the assembly in

February 1849 (*Beretning* 1848–1849: 2180–2268; Neergaard 1892: 408 f.).

After the provisional debate, the draft was returned to the committee members, who reconsidered their own proposals and studied the new proposals from the other members. On April 25, 1849, the assembly began the decisive discussion, during which votes were taken on every single proposal for revisions. The results were redrafted, and on May 25, 1849, the final vote on the constitution as a whole was taken. It was approved by 119 votes to 4, with 29 members either absent or else not voting. Grundtvig was among the non-voters. On June 5, 1849, the king, Frederik VII, reluctantly signed the constitution.

For the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly, one can consult the minutes that were published continuously at the time. The minutes supply us with the government draft, the different revisions suggested by the committee members, the content of the speeches held in plenum, and the votes on each issue. In addition, these minutes present the actual constitution as it was submitted to the king (*Beretning* 1848–1849: 2169; 2606–2610; 3208–3217; 3644–3648).

### The Proposals for Article 70 and the Subsequent Debate

In the draft for a Danish constitution, the government of March 1848 proposed the following wording of Articles 70 in chapter seven:

He who cannot support himself and his family by his work is entitled to obtain assistance from the public authorities. He has, however, to abide by those obligations for which the statutes herein prescribe.

Article 70 was discussed in a plenary meeting on Saturday, April 14, 1849. The committee suggested a minor modification, so the wording became:

He who cannot support himself and his family by his work is entitled to obtain assistance from the public authorities *if the support is not to be provided by somebody else*. He has, however, to abide by those obligations for which the statutes herein prescribe.

Another suggestion from Frederik Engelhardt Boisen (1808–1882; a parson and at that time a follower of Grundtvig) and Carl Emil Mundt (1802–1873; a professor and primarily a conservative) was discussed on Wednesday, May 19, 1849:

He who cannot support himself and his family by his work *can get help* from the public authorities, *if the support is not to be provided by somebody else*. He has, however, to abide by those obligations for which the statutes herein prescribe.

Grundtvig made a suggestion that could have supplanted both Articles 70 and 71 (the latter stipulated an obligation by the state to provide free primary school education to poor children); that suggestion, cited below, was debated and put to a vote on Wednesday, May 19, 1849:

Provision shall be made that, as far as possible, the old and poor, the sick, and abandoned children will be able to find public asylums and that even the most destitute may gain access to popular education and culture. (*Beretning* 1848–1849: 2607; 3208)

In the ensuing vote, Grundtvig's proposal was rejected, 82 to 22; the proposal by F. E. Boisen and C. E. Mundt was rejected as well, 62 to 57, whereas the proposal of the committee was passed by 104 to 12. The draft article with the above formulation, in a final vote, was then passed, 94 to 23 (*Beretning* 1848–1849: 3217).

It might be asked what Grundtvig's reasons were for his proposals on Article 70. In the debate on Article 70 on April 14, 1849, he stated:

It is a general right-to-relief that this article strives to introduce into Denmark's constitution, and as loudly and clearly as I can, I now must protest against it as one of the greatest misfortunes that could happen to the constitution and, if this right-to-relief really becomes part of the constitution, as a consequence also to the whole nation.

As we know, England, the wealthiest country in the whole world, has tried now for 300 years to make such a right-to-relief effective throughout the breadth of the land; and for a while, as long as, on the one hand, the Christian instinct toward charity and private philanthropy were powerfully at work and, on the other, there was—so to speak—no direct speculation in the relief for the poor, that attempt went on tolerably well. We have seen, from the information that has come to light through parliamentary investigations, that the poor tax at the beginning of the century was but one million pounds sterling, but in less than a generation it grew to eleven million pounds sterling. Finally, it was deemed impossible to continue, let alone to increase support. Then it was that England was strewn with poorhouses and that public relief was bound, as far as possible, to those institutions; and then it was that the most deserving persons among the poor came to lack support, because parents would not part from their children, spouses would not be separated from each other, and the freeborn, freedom-minded man would not go into a poorhouse, which was a house of compulsion and discipline.

All that was gained by limiting relief for the poor as far as possible to those houses was that the poor tax was forcibly reduced to eight million pounds sterling, an amount that still today heavily burdens that rich country, and when poor



relief was later extended to Ireland, it became apparent what the consequence is when a government obliges itself to provide a living for every person and mouth in the country, for one had thereby experienced what almost amounted to feeding an entire nation from hand to mouth.

The government drove itself to despair, because it had started something that was impossible to complete; promised what it could not possibly keep; and when one now reflects on what will be done to the constitution by introducing into it such a provision for a general right-to-relief, one finds that the government will then be obliged to be responsible for something even more obviously impossible than it is for the English government to feed the entire Irish nation, because the Danish government shall be obliged to feed the entire Danish nation without having an England to tax.

For that reason, I will vote in favour of there being no trace of such a provision in the Danish constitution; and if, nonetheless, something else must replace this provision, I will suggest that everything possible be done in order that the old, the sick, and abandoned children can find public asylums; ... (*Beretning* 1848–1849: No. 330, 2607; the 95<sup>th</sup> Public Meeting, Saturday, April 14, 1849)

From this longwinded speech it will be clear that Grundtvig fought a general right to relief and that his argumentation was based on purely economic reasoning, however blurred they might be. His arguments are taken from the English debate from the 1820s onwards. He refers to the English Poor Laws of 1597 to 1601 and postulates that the last generations have been speculating in the relief of the poor. The Old English Poor Laws laid down that each parish was to be responsible for the maintenance of its own poor. At the same time, the infirm poor were to be maintained and work was to be provided for the able-bodied. Overseers of the poor were to be nominated annually and the poor-rate levied upon the inhabitants. Under the Old Poor Laws deterrent workhouses, roundsman systems, allowances in aid of wages and payments in kind instead of money were all known or utilized in given places, as well as outdoor relief for families (Marshall 1968).

After 1815, this old system was under pressure due to the rapidly changing social and economic systems in Western Europe since the 1750s. A Commission was struck and its report was made public in 1832, resulting in the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 which obliterated outdoor relief and allowances in aid of wages with the purpose of deterring applicants for relief (*Reports...* 1832, and Langer 1969). Grundtvig refers in his speech to the commission's report. He repeats its economic estimates of expenses and he targets the allowances in aid of wages as an object of speculation. The Poor Law Amendment Act of

1834 did not reduce costs in any considerable way; it deterred the wrong people and was inhumane. Its extension to Ireland was an economic disaster for England. Therefore, the poor relief system had to go.

It is worth noting that in attacking both the Old and the New English Poor-relief System, Grundtvig in fact attacked the existing Danish poor relief system that had been established in 1803 by the absolutist government. The Danish Poor Law had been motivated by the theories of late mercantilism and of enlightened absolutism, which held that the monarch also had an obligation towards his own citizens (Harald Jørgensen 1940: 1-83).

In the following debate, another speaker, Anders Sandøe Ørsted,<sup>7</sup> remarked that it was impossible to compare the situation in England to that in Denmark since the distress in England was due to industrialization. To that, Grundtvig made another lengthy reply, which reiterated and substantiated some of his earlier argumentation:

Let me first say that it is quite true that the manufacturing industry in England has hastened despair over the relief system for the poor, but, indeed, in this respect, too, we are endeavouring to imitate the English nation as best we can, and, comparatively, it might then become just as bad here for us.

Next, I must add, however, that it is not the factories that have called forth the desperate situation in relief for the poor in Ireland, but to a large degree it lies in the parcelling out of land, where there is then to be found a whole family of paupers on every bit of it that is able to grow as many potatoes as it takes to feed two people and a hog.

Finally, it is not extrinsic reasons alone that make any right-to-relief reprehensible and dangerous.

Let me just mention two matters, among the numerous items of information that have come to light through parliamentary inquiries, that can immediately show us what kind of path we are wandering down by having a general right-to-relief.

On the one hand, it is reported that it is quite usual for the big factory owners or the bigger lessees or farmers to dismiss one-fourth or one-half of their workers as soon as the poor tax appears to them to be too high; these workers then have to be supported by the district authorities; and, later, the former accept them again at half the salary as a favour to the community. Thereby, the burden is placed on those who themselves are the nearest to becoming impoverished, and the number of paupers grows apace.

On the other hand, it has been reported that in many places workers, as, for instance, stone masons, can earn well for eight months out of a year; in London a great crowd of these workers throw themselves on the poor-law authority for

four months of the year, and this happens for no other reason than the negligence [of those employers] who rely on the poor-law authority.

(*Beretning* 1848–1849: 2608 f.)

On Wednesday, May 19, 1849, Grundtvig said the following concerning Articles 70 and 71:

Instead of these two articles, I have taken the liberty of proposing one article ...

It is in no way my intention by this proposal to suggest something new; but my motivation is that what these two articles try to authorize in the constitution is a right-to-relief and a broad right-to-schooling, which in reality is only a nice expression for compulsory school attendance.

These two things I hold it completely wrong and completely inappropriate to put into a constitution.

For my own part I believe, as I took the liberty to develop during the preliminary debate, that what is called a right-to-relief is both greatly preposterous, as the government is thereby obliged to feed the people, and greatly detrimental, not only to the people as a whole, but especially to the poor; ... But I certainly do not think that there ought to be anything written in the constitution about such matters.

On these important matters, one ought not anticipate legislation in any way, nor as little as possible preclude the good fruits and results of a different and better education.

Consequently, I shall not feel hurt in any way if my proposal for a new article gets no more votes than my own, if only no articles of a content similar to what is now contained in the [draft] proposal are put into the constitution.

(*Beretning* 1848–1849: 3209)

In his final speech on this subject, Grundtvig is clearly inspired by the theories of David Ricardo, which held that it was not only in vain to give poor relief it was also dangerous to the non-poor citizens and the whole economy as such.

These, then, are the laws by which wages are regulated and by which the happiness by far the greatest part of every community is governed ... Like all other contracts, wages should be left to the fair and free competition of the market, and should never be controlled by the interference of the legislature.

The clear and direct tendency of the poor laws is a direct opposition to these obvious principles: it is not, as the legislature benevolently intended, to amend the condition of the poor, but to deteriorate the condition of both poor and rich; instead of making the poor rich, they are calculated to make the rich poor ...

(Ricardo 1969: 61)

Only very few people spoke in support of the committee proposal, but as the committee stood united in this matter, obviously it did not deem it necessary to argue strongly against the liberals. Their spokesman, Carl Christian Hall (1812–1882; a lawyer and politician; member of the National-Liberal Party) only said that the committee deemed it prudent to uphold the article in its proposed wording. In addition, A. S. Ørsted commented that the obligations of the state in the proposal were in fact fewer than the actual poor laws stipulated. One man alone, the parson of the parish of “Vor Frelser Kirke” in Copenhagen, Carl Holger Visby (1801–1877), spoke up about society’s moral obligations towards its desolate citizens and the rights of these citizens to demand support from society. He had earlier functioned as priest in many of Copenhagen’s prisons and was one of the leading Danish spokesmen on social, pedagogical and philanthropic issues. Politically, he was a conservative and he said:

I want it to be stated in this assembly that there are diverging views as to whether the poor have a right to relief or not. I believe that the natural feeling of every human being as well as religion gives this right to him.

(*Beretning* 1848–1849: 2610)

### **The Limitations of Grundtvig’s Humanity**

Looking at the statements above, one can now assess Grundtvig’s most famous and most often cited saying from 1837: “First, human; then, Christian.” For Grundtvig that distinction in the relation between religious belief and human life did not imply, however, a social obligation to secure every individual a humane way of life. It is striking that Grundtvig attacked the English poor relief system for its inhumanity, but he did not recognize any social obligation towards creating a humane poor relief system. Instead, he turned to economic arguments, which were supposed to show that it was impossible for a rich nation to support even an inhumane poor relief system. So, the best thing would be to give up the effort completely.

The next best thing would be to limit the poor relief system to one that, if economically possible, took care of only the deserving poor. Those deserving poor were already provided for by the poor laws of Denmark of 1803. Indeed, Grundtvig’s proposal was narrower in its scope and commitment than the laws of 1803. Grundtvig did not recognize any obligation towards the unemployed. Unemployment to him was

self-inflicted, and accordingly could be remedied by the individual in any liberal and democratic society.

In such thinking, he clearly followed the English economist David Ricardo (1772–1823), who developed his ideas in his book of 1817, *The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*. There, in his theories on the determination of wages and values, Ricardo maintains that wages tend to stabilize around the subsistence level and that the value of almost any type of goods is a function of the labour needed to produce it. Consequently, in any economy, there would always be some paupers living at the subsistence level, and every attempt by society to ease the lives of those paupers through support would be in vain and in fact harmful, because it would set up a mechanism for relief that would encompass the economy of the entire society (Ricardo 1969: especially Chapter V on wages, 52–63).

The Danish scholarly world has mainly praised Grundtvig's classic liberal economic views, and praised as well his strong opposition to Marxism. Grundtvig could have made other choices however. He could have joined the philanthropists, who built on the theories of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), given in the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* of 1789 (Bentham 1970), or else he could have joined some of the many utopian socialists of his time, such as Saint-Simon (1760–1825). In his book *Nouveau Christianisme*, published in 1825, Saint-Simon underlined work as the source to society's wealth and progress, and as most work is performed by the worst-off social class, there has to be a pivotal task of religion to lift and support the lower classes physically and spiritually (see Fakkar 1968).

It is striking that Grundtvig did not realize the consequences of his economic-political attitude on his national public educational program. His "unworldly" attitude in the economic field meant that a large part of the population was excluded from being "human" and then, truly Christian. That part of the population had to find other prophets, whereas the growing bourgeois class of Danish farmers took Grundtvig's views to heart and developed a class-consciousness of their own worth and a culture that was to be, until recently, a dominant factor in Denmark (Zerlang 1976: 192 ff.)

Seen in this light, it is quite ironic that during the early 1970s, Grundtvig became the political prophet of Danish socialist left-wing parties and of anti-European Community forces in Denmark. He became

this at the same time that the bourgeois, liberal farmers' party (*Venstre*) was hailing him as its liberal, anti-socialist spiritual leader.<sup>8</sup>

## NOTES

1. See Christian Thodberg and Anders Thyssen, eds. *Grundtvig og grundtvigianismen i nyt lys. Hovedtanker og udviklingslinjer. Fra de senere års Grundtvigsforskning*. Århus: Anis, 1983; Regin Prenter. *Den kirkelige anskuelse. En indførelse i N.F.S. Grundtvigs folkelige og kirkelige grundtanker*. Christiansfeldt: Udvalget for Konvent for Kirke og Theologi, 1983; Christian Thodberg. *En glemt dimension i Grundtvigs salmer—Bundetheden til dåbsritualet*. Copenhagen: Et danske Selskab, 1972; Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen. *Det handlende ord. N.F.S. Grundtvigs digtning, litteraturkritik og poetik 1798–1819*. 2 vols. Copenhagen: Gad, 1980; Flemming Ettrup and Johs. H. Christensen, eds. *De levenes Land. Grundtvig 1984*. Copenhagen: Danmarks Biblioteksforenings Forlag, 1984; Holger Kjær. *Højskolens grund*. Konrad Jørgensens Bogtrykkeri: DBK, 1971; Poul Engberg. *Den danske sag. Folkelighed og kristendom hos Grundtvig 1845–55*. Copenhagen: Grevas, 1977. Further documentation can be found in Aage Jørgensen. *Grundtviglitteratur 1963–1985. En bibliografi*. Århus: CUK, 1986 and in the yearly volumes of *Grundtvig Studier*, published since 1948 by "Grundtvig-selskabet af 8. september 1947."

2. Kaj Thaning. *Menneske først—Grundtvigs opgør med sig selv*. 3 vols. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1963: 13, 52, 75, 83, 101, 122, 129, 177, II 342–378, III 609–55. One should mention though that Thaning's views have been challenged during the last decade. See Helge Grell. *Skaberånd og folkeånd. En undersøgelse af Grundtvigs tanker om folk og folkelighed og deres forhold til hans kristendomssyn*. Århus: Skrifter udgivet af Grundtvigselskabet, 1988; Jens Holger Schjørring, ed. *Menneske først, kristen så. Helge Grells Grundtvig—disputats til debat*. Århus: Anis, 1988.

3. See also Hal Koch. *Grundtvig*. Copenhagen: Gad, 1944: 163 ff.; Bent Christensen. *Omkring Grundtvigs vidskab. En undersøgelse af N.F.S. Grundtvigs forhold til den erkendelsesmæssige side af det kristeligt nødvendige livsengagement*. Copenhagen: Gad, 1998: 280–314, 506–509, 514–523.

4. Poul Andersen. *Grundtvig som Rigsdagsmand og andre afhandlinger*. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel—Nordisk Forlag, 1940: 9–55, especially 37. The same emphasis, without any mention of the social dimension, is to be found in Kaj Thaning. "Grundtvig og den grundlovgivende rigsforsamling." *Grundtvig Studier* (1949): 35–73.

5. See Roar Skovmand. "Folkestyrets Fødsel 1830–1870," in John Danstrup and Hal Koch, eds. *Danmarks Historie 11*. Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag, 1964: 277–87; Vagn Skovgaard-Petersen. "Tiden 1814–1864," in H.P. Clausen and Søren Mørch, eds. *Danmarks historie 5*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1985: 230–237; Claus Bjørn. "Fra reaktion til grundlov 1800–1850," in Olaf Olsen, ed. *Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarks-historie 10*. Copenhagen: Politiken & Gyldendal, 1990: 343–346. The one exception to this positive interpretation based on the same evidence is Søren Mørch. *Den sidste*

Danmarkshistorie. 57 fortællinger af fædrelandets historie. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1996: 113–129.

6. The only reference made to Grundtvig's "famous" speeches on economic and social matters in the Constituent Assembly is by Baagøe, quoting just a few lines. See that cited work.

7. Anders Sandøe Ørsted (1778–1860) was a man of the old regime and he had been Attorney-General for several decades.

8. See Ebbe Kløvedal Reich. *Frederik. En folkebog om N.F.S. Grundtvigs tid og liv*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1972; Poul Dam. *Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783–1872)*. Copenhagen: Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1983; Ejvind Larsen. *Grundtvig—og noget om Marx*. Århus: Studenterkredsen, 1974: 79 f.; Ejvind Larsen. *Det levende ord. Om Grundtvig*. Charlottenborg: Rosinante, 1983: 120, 130–60, 289–99; Henrik S. Nissen, ed. *Efter Grundtvig. Hans betydning i dag*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1983: 9–22, 63–91; Finn Stein Larsen and Erik Bernstorff, eds. *Et Grundtvig-festskrift. I anledning af hans 200-årsdag*. Århus: Århus Katedralskole, 1983: 66–70. See also the liberal approach in Bertel Haarder, Erik Nilsson and Hanne Severinsen. *Ny-liberalismen og dens rødder*. Holte [Copenhagen]: Liberal, 1982: 69 f., 82 ff.; as well as Bertel Haarder. *Slip friheden løs—og giv ansvar*. Copenhagen: Headline, 1990: 18, 32; and Bertel Haarder. *Grænser for politik*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1990: 36 ff., 124 f. Here you find articles of true Grundtvigian adherers in the classic liberal sense.

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# Multiculturalism Reconsidered: Swedish and Canadian Political Response to Migration Issues in the 1990s

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**ABSTRACT:** This essay considers the manner in which immigration/refugee policies became issues of increasing concern in Sweden and Canada during the 1970s and 1980s and how issues of migration and multiculturalism emerged as topics of public debate in the elections of the 1990s. It chronicles the similar paths taken by both societies in moving away from largely supportive attitudes toward migration and multiculturalism and their subsequent adoption of more critical stances toward new arrivals in their communities. There is a particular focus on the manner in which both new and established political parties in each country have endeavoured to respond to changing public attitudes in these areas.

**RÉSUMÉ:** Cet essai examine la question des politiques de l'immigration et des réfugiés qui ont suscité de plus en plus de souci en Suède et au Canada dans les années 1970 et 1980. Sera étudiée aussi la manière dont les questions liées à la migration et au multiculturalisme sont devenues des sujets de débat public dans les élections des années 1990. On rapportera les solutions similaires choisies par les deux sociétés, qui ont abandonné une attitude éminemment encourageante envers la migration et le multiculturalisme et ont adopté des positions plus critiques envers les nouveaux arrivants dans leurs communautés. On se concentrera tout particulièrement sur la manière dont les partis politiques des deux pays, aussi bien nouveaux que déjà établis, se sont efforcés de réagir aux changements d'attitude publique dans ces domaines.

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Today, both in Canada and Sweden, the problems of migration and multiculturalism have become significant issues of public concern. Like other social policy questions including health care, education and the treatment of the elderly, these twinned issues have become central elements of the current public debate over the future shape and direction of

each society. The contemporary press and media are filled with stories describing the varied experiences of immigrants and refugees who have settled in each country.<sup>1</sup> They also recount the growing sense of unease on the part of some native-born Canadians and Swedes toward these new arrivals.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps at no other time in the recent history of either country has the issue of welcoming new members into their community been as directly linked with broader questions of national identity and purpose.

In many ways, the issues of migration and multiculturalism have entered the arena of public discussion without extensive forewarning. Both Canada and Sweden have long taken pride in their relatively open and welcoming attitudes toward new immigrants and refugees. Although expressions of public unease over the size and impact of these recent arrivals have existed on the edges of political debate in both countries for over twenty years, it has only been in the last decade that they have become significant public policy concerns. This transformation has coincided with the rise of new political parties in each society that have made migration and multiculturalism issues central elements of their electoral appeal.<sup>3</sup> While it would be hard to argue that either the Reform Party in Canada or the New Democracy Party in Sweden precipitated this change in public attitudes, nonetheless, their emergence in the early 1990s reflected growing public unhappiness with the policies and approaches of the established political parties. Multicultural principles and values that had looked so attractive in the early 1970s have become far less popular in the 1990s. As a consequence, the governments of both Canada and Sweden have had to make changes in their approach to immigration and refugee settlement in recent years.

### *The Nature of the Inquiry*

This essay examines the changing nature of the public's response to immigration/refugee issues in Sweden and Canada. It endeavours to explore how alterations in public opinion have had an impact on the policy process and the party system in both societies. The essay begins by considering the manner in which immigration/refugee policies became issues of increasing concern in Sweden and Canada during the 1970s and 1980s. It then moves to examine how questions of migration and multiculturalism emerged as issues of public debate during parliamentary elections of the 1990s. The essay chronicles the similar paths

taken by both societies in moving away from largely supportive attitudes toward migration and multiculturalism and their subsequent adoption of more hesitant and critical stances toward new arrivals in their communities. The essay focuses particular attention on the manner in which both new and established political parties in each country have endeavoured to respond to changing public attitudes in these areas. It looks at the specific manner in which immigration/refugee policies in Sweden and Canada have become increasingly reflective of growing unease on the part of the general public and some political elites. The paper concludes with an effort to discern the primary factors that are likely to set the directions for migration and multiculturalism in Sweden and Canada in the coming decades.

### *Comparing Canadian and Swedish Migration Policies*

It would appear that Canada and Sweden would be useful cases to compare in that both countries have been identified as having followed similar policies in migrant reception and settlement. These policies have been referred to as being "multicultural" in character.<sup>4</sup> Over the past two decades the governments of Canada and Sweden have welcomed an increasingly ethnically diverse flow of migrants and have encouraged these new arrivals to maintain their own cultural identities within their new societies. They have argued that by maintaining such diversity within their communities both the migrants and host society are benefited. Such an approach was quite innovative in migration policy thinking in the 1970s. Since that time, Canadians and Swedes have frequently looked to each other for continued inspiration and advice. Some comparative studies have been undertaken of their success in implementing such policies. However, they tend to be dwarfed by the number of comparisons made with the United States and some other European states. Additional work in this area seems warranted. It should be noted that while both Canada and Sweden receive a significant number of migrants each year, their make-up is considerably different. Immigrants still represent the largest category of arrivals in Canada, while refugees form the largest group in Sweden.

### *Canadian Immigration Policy Prior to 1993*

Canadians have been receiving immigrants and incorporating them into their society for over one hundred and thirty years. However, it has only been in the past several decades that formal government policies

have been adopted to help direct these processes. In the case of both immigration and ethnic settlement, the phenomenon existed prior to any organized public thought or approach to it. This reality has had a major impact on the type of policy approaches that successive governments have pursued. Policy formulation has come often as an afterthought to established trends and events (see García y Griego 1994).

Prior to the Second World War, Canadian immigration policies largely consisted of a general *laissez-faire* attitude bolstered by occasional legislation directed at restricting the entrance of certain "undesirable" classes of immigrants (Hawkins 1972: 71–88). Throughout much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there existed a generally positive disposition in much of Canada toward immigrants and the contributions they were making to the building of the new country. However, no founding "immigrant myth" developed in Canada comparable to that which established itself in the United States and came to color subsequent policy debates in that country. Instead, immigration in Canada was seen simply as reflecting normal economic and social pressures within society (Palmer 1975: 4–7). Thus, hundreds of thousands of immigrants were generally welcomed at the turn of the century in response to the settlement needs of the Canadian West. Equally significant, however, was the restriction of new arrivals to Canada in the late 1920s and 1930s as a result of major downturns in the economy and concern over the ethnic and social backgrounds of some would-be immigrants. Throughout the entire first half of the twentieth century there existed a marked preference in Canada for immigrants from the British Isles and northern Europe. This attitude was reflected in both the anti-Asian immigration regulations of the day and in the encouragement of "preferred immigrants" to settle in the country.

It was not until 1947, however, that the Canadian government undertook a formal review of the type of on-going immigration policy it should adopt. In the wake of post-war dislocations in Europe and elsewhere, it was deemed prudent that the country establish some basic principles guiding the reception of new immigrants and refugees. At the time, Prime Minister Mackenzie King emphasized the fact that settlement in Canada should not be conceived as a fundamental right open to all. Instead, he indicated that it should be viewed as a privilege extended by the Canadian people when domestic social and economic conditions allowed. King stressed that immigration to Canada had to be linked to

the "absorptive capacity" of the nation. In his mind, this "absorptive capacity" was to be determined as much by the ethnic or racial origins of potential immigrants as well as their overall numbers. He noted in his statement in the House of Commons that: "The people of Canada do not wish, as a result of mass immigration, to make a fundamental alteration in the character of our population. Canada is perfectly within her rights in selecting the persons whom we regard as desirable future citizens" (House of Commons, *Debates* 1947: 2644-47). King's comments reflected a formal acknowledgment of a disposition toward selective admission that had existed in Canada from the outset of the century.

This attitude was enshrined in the subsequent 1952 Immigration Act. Its provisions called for a steady growth in the number of immigrants admitted to Canada, but still on a highly selective basis. Emphasis was given to recruiting European immigrants who possessed the appropriate cultural background and workplace skills that were needed in the post-war expansion of the Canadian economy. The 1952 legislation gave the Minister of Immigration and his officials extensive powers to set regulations that would reflect the "absorptive capacity" of the country. At the discretion of the Minister, individuals or groups might be excluded on the grounds of nationality, geographic origin, and peculiarity of custom, or for being "unable to assimilate." Essentially, such regulations allowed for the continuation of pre-war racial bias against non-white immigrants, especially Asians (Knowles 1992: 118-136).

It was not until 1962 that such racially exclusionary policies were dropped from the Canadian immigration code. Even then, the decision came reluctantly and only through the continued prodding of non-white members of the Commonwealth. Harold Troper has noted in this regard that: "It might be argued that Canada backed into a non-racist immigration policy. The motivation was less to court non-white immigration than it was to improve Canada's international image and bring legislation into line with domestic human rights policy more generally" (Troper 1993: 226). In this case, external pressures won out over domestic bias.

The elimination of overt barriers to non-white immigrants in the 1960s increased the number of applicants from Asian, African and Caribbean countries. By the end of the decade nearly twenty-five percent of immigrants being admitted to the country came from these areas. Policy reviews in 1966 and 1973 further expanded opportunities for

Third World citizens to come to Canada—either as independent or sponsored immigrants or as refugees. During the subsequent decade of relatively liberal admission practices, their numbers increased dramatically. By 1985, non-European immigration had grown to a level representing sixty percent of the total number of applicants admitted to the country in that year (*Profiles* 1986: 20).

Throughout this period of time, national immigration policy failed to emerge as an issue of partisan debate within Canada. During the policy reviews of 1966 and 1973, all of the major political parties took pains to present themselves as pro-immigrant. While both government and opposition called for greater attention to be paid to employment criteria in the selection of would-be migrants, each remained as strong advocates of family reunification and sponsored immigration. Until the late 1980s, nearly all Canadian political leaders also expressed their support for a liberal refugee policy. They continued to voice an unshakable belief in immigration being a key to the economic and social growth of the nation. As late as 1992, the Conservative government of Brian Mulroney set as its goal an annual admission target of 200,000 immigrants—this at a time of severe economic recession. Despite growing signs of unease among the general public, Canadian political leaders, for the most part, were solid supporters of an open and inclusive national immigration policy (Bergman 1994: 35).

### *Swedish Immigration Policy Prior to 1991*

Sweden, unlike Canada, has not had a long history of immigrant reception. While in earlier periods, Sweden had become home to a variety of European migrants, during much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the country was more a country of emigration rather than an immigrant-receiving society. In the period between 1850 and 1920, there was a major outflow of Swedish immigrants to North America. It is estimated that close to one quarter of the entire country's population left for the cities and farmlands of Canada and the United States. This pattern of out-migration continued, on a smaller scale, right until the start of the Second World War.<sup>5</sup>

It was not until the 1940s, that Sweden became a significant immigrant and refugee-receiving society. As a consequence of major wartime dislocations, large numbers of Nordic and Baltic refugees sought entrance into Sweden and for the most part were readily accom-



modated. After the war, the Swedish government continued to be active in refugee settlement and established an international reputation for effective work in this field. It also became one of the first nations to accept an annual quota of refugees under the auspices of the UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] and the UNRWA [United Nations Relief and Works Agency].

During the post-war era, the Swedish government also encouraged its business firms to recruit and settle workers from other Nordic and European nations in order to meet the growing labour needs of its expanding economy. In 1954, it helped to negotiate and sign a Common Labour Market Agreement between the Nordic countries that allowed for the free movement of workers across national borders within the region. As a result of such initiatives, some 250,000 new immigrants settled in Sweden during the 1950s (see Westin 1996).

Like other European industrial countries in the 1960s, Sweden experienced a steady flow of immigration from the south. Workers coming primarily from Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey sought ready employment opportunities in both the industrial and service sectors of the Swedish economy. Until the mid-1960s, their movement was generally greeted with broad indifference by the Swedish government, the labor unions and the general public. Only when annual arrival rates peaked at 36,000 in 1966 did the Social Democratic government of the day impose the requirement of a labour permit for all would-be non-Nordic immigrants. The basic prerequisites for securing such a labor permit (*arbetstillstånd*) was an employer's guarantee of an existing job and housing as well as the acceptance by the labour union that all domestic sources had been exhausted. Increasingly, as the post-war economic boom came to an end, these preconditions became more difficult to meet. By the early 1970s, immigration flows to Sweden from outside the Nordic region decreased to a small trickle. Whereas the decade of the 1960s saw some 235,000 immigrants settle in Sweden, no more than 150,000 new immigrants came in the 1970s (see Hammar 1985).

Since 1972, labour migration to Sweden has virtually ceased. During the twenty years between 1974 and 1994, an average of only 250 persons per year have been granted resident work permits. Government attention has shifted from the concerns of immigrants to the needs of political, social and economic refugees that have become the major component of Sweden's present "foreign" population. The number of

such refugees grew rapidly in the late 1970s and 1980s as the country tried to respond through both its foreign and migration policies to a series of international crises in Latin America, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Sweden became internationally known as a safe haven for those in risk of repression at home (see Appelqvist 1995).

In 1969, a new government agency, the Swedish Immigration Board (*Statens invandraverk*) was established to address a growing number of issues and problems associated with the arrival of new immigrants and refugees. During the subsequent four years, the Board and the newly created Commission on Immigration investigated the need for public measures to be taken on behalf of the new immigrants and ethnic minorities within the society. Finally, in 1975 the Swedish Parliament passed new legislation addressing immigrant and refugee concerns. As with the Canadian case, such efforts were initiated in a period of time in which there was a generally positive and embracing social and political environment in Sweden. Immigration and refugee issues had yet to become an area of divisive debate within the country (see Bäck and Soininen 1998).

### *Multiculturalism Conceived and Reconsidered—Canada*

The development of government policy toward multiculturalism in Canada has taken place with only limited coherence and focus. Although Canada was founded on the basis of a bilingual and bicultural pact between the French and English, the impact of other immigrant groups was felt very early in the evolution of the society. It was clear by the opening of the prairie provinces at the end of the nineteenth century, that Canada would have a multicultural character. References to a "cultural mosaic" entered into the literature on immigrant settlement very early in the twentieth century. The population of Canada became even more multicultural in character with the expansion of immigration following the Second World War and the economic boom years of the 1950s (see Wilson 1993).

It was not until the 1960s, however, that the Federal government began to speak of the need for a multiculturalism policy. It came about almost as an afterthought to the work of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism during the same decade. Concerned that western Canadians did not see themselves fully within the context of a bilingual/bicultural society, the Liberal government of the day began to

promote a policy of "multiculturalism" that might embrace citizens outside of the two founding races. It called for the recognition and promotion of other cultural identities beyond those of English and French. The work of various ethnic associations in Canada was to be supported by the federal government. So too were their publications and conferences. Efforts to promote racial understanding and community harmony were also promoted in the spirit of a Canada made up of many peoples and identities (see Ungerleider 1992).

In late 1971, Prime Minister Trudeau formally announced the new multiculturalism policy in the House of Commons. Its call for government support for a diversity of ethnic cultures, traditions and languages within Canada was roundly supported by all the federal political parties—although no one seemed to have a very clear idea of the precise parameters of such a program. As Andrew Cardozo (1994: 16) observed: "The understanding and development of the policy remained sadly shallow at the political level. All parties appeared to actively or tacitly support multiculturalism because it seemed to be the right thing to do and because one's position on it could result in gaining or angering the ethnic vote." For nearly a decade, the Canadian multiculturalism program continued fully supported by the political establishment—however, without a firm direction or purpose. It should be noted, however, that attitudes towards multiculturalism in Quebec were somewhat less sanguine—particularly when federal multicultural policies were interpreted as a challenge to provincial autonomy (see Fontaine 1995).

Finally in 1988, actual legislation on multiculturalism was introduced by the Conservative Mulroney government and was passed unanimously by the Canadian House of Commons. It created a formal federal program of action and vested responsibility for its implementation within a new Department of Citizenship and Immigration. Many critics have suggested, however, that such actions contained more symbolism than substance. Apart from regular photo opportunities at which program officials were seen dispensing funding for race relations seminars or ethnic literature colloquia, no core identity or purpose emerged for the initiative. As a consequence, when budget-cutting exercises were undertaken by the Campbell government in early 1993, the multiculturalism portfolio was dropped from the cabinet. Some suggested that it would not be missed (see Bissoondath 1994).

*Multiculturalism Conceived and Reconsidered—Sweden*

Similar attitudes towards multiculturalism were in evidence in Sweden during the same era. Although the number of immigrants and refugees coming to Sweden in the 1970s and 1980s were not as large as those arriving in Canada, their impact on their host society was equally significant. For the first time in their national history, growing numbers of Swedes began to consider themselves as part of a multicultural community. The emergence of significant visible immigrant and refugee populations in urban centers such as Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö was twinned with the recognition of existing internal minorities like the Sami and Finns in the north, as well as other long-term resident Finnish immigrants.

Government policies of the day began to speak of the need to formally recognize the contributions of each of these multicultural groups to the past, present and future evolution of Swedish society (see Hammar 1993).

As part of this endeavour to recognize the particular needs and contributions of the new immigrants and refugees, the Swedish government of the day sponsored a series of educational, social and economic initiatives on their behalf. These included the provision of Swedish language and cultural instruction for all new arrivals and the offering of second language instruction for refugee children within the school system. They also included government support and funding for immigrant associations, immigrant language newspapers, the purchase of foreign language literature for public libraries and the allocation of time on Swedish television and radio for multicultural programming (see Ring 1995).

All of this was done in the name of a social policy that stressed three goals: *equality* between immigrants and Swedes, *freedom of cultural choice* for all immigrants, and *cooperation and solidarity* between the native-born Swedish majority and the various ethnic minorities of the country. In the confident days of the 1970s and early 1980s, it appeared that immigrants and refugees in Sweden were being readily incorporated into a multicultural "people's home" (see Ålund and Schierup 1993). In 1975, resident aliens were accorded the right to vote and run for office in local and regional elections. In 1986, an *Ombudsman Against Ethnic Discrimination* was empowered to investigate acts

of discrimination in the workplace and within other areas of community life.

However, much like the experience in Canada, this sudden recognition of a multicultural identity within Swedish society tended to be more symbolic than real. Legislation was revised and politicians made speeches calling for greater ethnic, religious and linguistic tolerance and acceptance, but the roots of multiculturalism did not spread widely or deeply. By the mid-1980s a series of anti-immigrant and refugee protests by nativist groups began to appear in both urban and rural centres of the country. Although by no means as virulent as the "anti-foreigner" campaigns in either Germany or France during the same period, the Swedish protests tended to politicize the immigration/refugee issue and raise serious doubts as to whether the average citizen of Sweden was as accepting of the idea of multiculturalism as their political leaders had assumed (see Westin 1995).

### *The 1993 Canadian Federal Election*

As had been the case in most previous federal election campaigns, the issues of immigration and multiculturalism did not initially elicit major public debate in 1993. This was partly because other concerns—predominantly those of employment and debt—occupied much of the public discourse. Equally important, however, was the conscious decision of the three established Canadian political parties not to make these potentially divisive issues matters of partisan debate. In the campaign literature that the Liberal, Progressive Conservative and New Democratic parties produced, each called for a continuation of fairly open immigration and refugee policies—albeit with some expressed concern over the need to monitor the expenses associated with the various programs. The Liberals and Conservatives contested with one another over who would be the most generous in their recommended admission targets. The Liberals "won" by promising to set an annual target of one percent of the existing Canadian population (see Nord 1997).

In the case of the Liberals, a specific list of proposed migration policy initiatives were set forth in their campaign Red Book. These included continued commitments to the settlement of both independent and family class immigrants and refugees. They called for reforms to the Immigration and Refugee Appeals Board, an expansion of second lan-

guage training opportunities and the broadening of admission criteria based on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. They noted that the Liberal Party had been long associated with a "progressive" approach to immigration policy. In their minds this meant bringing forth an immigration policy that "balances humanitarian considerations with our demographic and economic needs" (Liberal Party of Canada 1993: 86–88).

Each of the established parties also endorsed the goal of a "multicultural Canada" —leaving the precise meaning of the term to be established by the individual voter. Each indicated that if they were given power they would expand opportunities and services in the area. Again, the Liberal Party in its Red Book out-promised both the Tories and the NDP [New Democratic Party]. They noted that one of their priorities, if elected, would be the creation of a Canadian Race Relations Foundation—a campaign promise that the Conservative Mulroney government had failed to deliver in 1991.

Only the new populist Reform Party adopted a critical stance toward both immigration and multiculturalism policies of the day. Its leader, Preston Manning, along with several of his party colleagues on more than one occasion railed against "abuses" within the federal immigration and refugee programs—citing both bureaucratic inefficiencies within the system as well as "wrong-headed" policy formation. They suggested that new immigrants and refugees were often taking advantage of federal and provincial health and welfare programs. They noted that some new immigrants and refugees had been found to engage in criminal behavior. Furthermore, they noted that their growing numbers were creating unnecessary job-competition for native-born Canadians (see O'Neil 1993).

The Reform Party candidates were equally strident with respect to existing federal multiculturalism initiatives. Many of their candidates questioned the need for programs that encouraged "ethnic separation" rather than building of a single Canadian identity and community. They argued that efforts at second-language instruction and promotion of cultural pluralism in the schools were unnecessary (see Sabadhikari 1997). Furthermore, they indicated that multiculturalism programs were a waste of taxpayers' money and should be a priority item in any future budget-cutting exercise.

For the most part, the established Canadian political parties professed to take little notice of the criticism directed against immigration

and multiculturalism by the Reform Party. Some of their candidates indicated that such attacks were racist and divisive in character and lowered the general tone of the election debate. Nonetheless, a significant segment of the Canadian electorate responded quite favorably to much of the Reform message. The new populist party garnered nearly 19% of the national vote in the 1993 election—coming within two seats of forming the official opposition to the new Liberal government (see Nevitte 1998). When queried as to the reason for their support of the new populist party, Reform voters argued that Manning and his colleagues were simply voicing some “home truths” concerning the level of ethnic and racial tensions in Canadian society. They indicated that these trends had been exacerbated by too embracing national migration and settlement policies (Flanagan 1995: 68).

### *The Swedish Election of 1991*

Almost at the same time that the Swedish government was proclaiming the nation's commitment to multiculturalism in its social policy, the first signs of growing dissatisfaction with a prescribed inclusive refugee policy were manifesting themselves in both urban and rural segments of Swedish society. Starting in the mid-1980s, a series of anti-immigrant and refugee protests took place in communities such as Stockholm, Malmö, and Växjö (see Arter 1992). This unrest was precipitated, in part, by worsening economic conditions. High unemployment and rising costs of social welfare programs were linked by some politicians and opinion leaders to growing numbers of refugees within Sweden. Public unease over the situation was further accentuated by regular press accounts of assorted social, economic and criminal concerns linked to the presence of new arrivals within Swedish society. Public opinion surveys of the time revealed that nearly half of the Swedish public felt that there were “too many foreigners” within the country (see Rosenberg 1995).

In an effort to respond to this growing public unease over the reception of growing numbers of foreign refugees, the Social Democratic government took action in early December of 1989 and introduced more stringent regulations governing the admission of new refugee claimants to Sweden. This “Lucia decision,” as it became known, insisted on the strict application of the precise provisions of the United Nations Convention on Refugees in making all entrance decisions. Sweden was

moving away from becoming a dependable safe haven. The Social Democrats also rather belatedly expanded economic assistance for local communities "hosting" both new and existing refugees. Several of these communities had witnessed a number of acts of anti-refugee protest in the late 1980s (see Ring 1995: 163–165 and Demker 1993).

Most of these new initiatives, however, were perceived by the general public as being both inadequate and coming far too late to address their growing concerns over refugee arrivals. In the general election of 1991, the Social Democrats were criticized by their political rivals for having been far too passive on the migration issue and having no appreciation for how their innovative refugee and multiculturalism policies were transforming the established character of Swedish society (see Svåsand 1998). The New Democracy Party—a new populist protest party very similar in several respects to the Reform Party in Canada—became the focus for public criticism of existing public policy in these areas. Its leaders complained that bureaucratic elites within government had become overly enamoured with multicultural principles and failed to appreciate the difficulties of transforming them into effective policy. They argued that too many refugees were ending up unemployed and not fully integrated into Swedish society. New Democracy Party leaders promised that, if elected, their *Riksdag* members would endeavour to push for major reforms in refugee policy in the next parliament.

The results of the 1991 Swedish election gave the New Democracy Party significant public support for its critical stance on refugee and multiculturalism matters. The party received 7% of the national vote and helped to push the Social Democrats from power. While it is clear that public support for the new populist party was not based exclusively on its criticism of Social Democratic refugee and multiculturalism policies, it was evident to all that the New Democracy Party had seized upon an issue of growing public concern within Sweden (see Taggart 1997: 110–112). Over the course of the subsequent parliament, New Democracy members of the *Riksdag* introduced a series of private member bills calling for dramatic alterations in established policy on both refugee reception and the development of multiculturalism policies. One of these bills called for a national referendum on the whole migration issue and noted in its preamble that "Ordinary Swedes are asking themselves why more immigrants are being taken in, when jobs



are in short supply, the economy has collapsed, crime is on the increase and foreigners sitting in jail are being granted Swedish citizenship" (Arter 1992: 367). While none of these bills were enacted by the *Riksdag*, they nonetheless served notice on the Swedish government and bureaucracy that public enthusiasm for an embracing refugee policy had come to an end.

### *Reconsidering Migration Policy and Direction*

The second half of the 1990s has witnessed far less dramatic but, nonetheless, significant political discussions of migration and multiculturalism in both Canada and Sweden. The political development of the Reform and New Democracy Parties have turned out to be somewhat different from one another. For its part, the Reform Party has continued to establish itself as a significant political force within Canada. In the 1997 Federal election, it collected close to 20% of the popular vote and achieved the status of the official opposition to the Liberal government (see Ellis and Archer 1997). During the electoral campaign, it continued to criticize what it viewed as obvious abuses and limitations of Canadian immigration policy. Reform argued for the quick removal of illegal migrants from the country and a limitation on social welfare benefits that were accorded to all new arrivals. Several of the party's spokespersons argued against the continuation of multicultural approaches to migrant settlement noting the importance of strengthening the "common national heritage and tradition" and of avoiding the creation of competing ethnic, linguistic or cultural identities. Reform, however, did take pains to note that it was not against all immigration. It simply wanted to make sure that "average Canadians" would have a greater voice in determining the appropriate number and source of newcomers. It also took the calculated political step of selecting a few ethnic and naturalized Canadians to run as candidates in selected ridings. A few of these candidates actually won seats and have since helped to give the Reform Party at least a superficial appearance of being "sensitive" to migrant concerns (Nevitte 1998: 191).

In Sweden, the New Democracy Party has experienced a very different fate. Whereas in the early 1990s it exercised considerable influence both in and outside the *Riksdag*, today it has all but disappeared as a political movement. During the period between 1991 and 1994, it forcefully argued its contention that Sweden needed to significantly re-

duce the number of refugees being admitted to the country. It also suggested that an effort be undertaken to increase the speed by which all new arrivals were fully incorporated into the social and work dimensions of Swedish society. New Democracy sought to pressure the new non-socialist government of the day to rethink the previously accepted policy principle of "freedom of cultural choice" and replace it with a far less inclusive option (Westin 1995: 334–335). Ultimately, however, internal leadership bickering and lack of a clear and consistent overall party message led to the party's decline in popularity. In the parliamentary elections of 1994, New Democracy received less than the required four percent of the popular vote to retain representation in the *Riksdag*. In the 1998 national election, it did not even field an organized list of candidates.

Although the evolution of Reform and New Democracy have followed almost opposite political trajectories, they have both had similar influences in shaping the debates on immigration in both Canada and Sweden. They have brought into the arena of discourse a topic that the established parties have sought to evade. They have forced politicians and the public to closely examine the principles and values around which they have constructed their national migration policies. They have also required government policy makers and administrators to consider some of the challenges encountered in transforming laudable ideals into everyday practice.

In Canada, during the second half of the decade, there has been a continuing effort by the Liberal government to revise elements of its immigration and refugee policies so that they are more responsive to some of the criticism that they have received from the Reform Party and the general public. Over the past five years, the federal government has sought to stiffen the criteria for the admission of both new immigrants and refugees, giving greater attention to how new arrivals will integrate themselves economically and socially within Canada. It has also taken more aggressive steps to intercept undocumented workers, to deport illegal immigrants, and to limit the appeals of suspect refugees. Both the federal and provincial governments of Canada have also begun to cut back on their support of various multicultural activities, citing both budget restraints and the need to promote a sense of greater national unity (see Adam-Moodley 1997). Significantly, since the 1993 federal election, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration has undertaken two

major reviews of the future directions and goals of Canadian immigration and refugee policies (see Nord 1998: 185–202). A central element of both has been a desire to connect the views of the general public with the policy proposals developed within the bureaucracy. In this manner, Canadian migration policy is deemed to be responsive to public views. As Lucienne Robillard, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, (1999) has recently noted: “The public at large must also be engaged in the discussion—they cannot feel that policies or programs are being forced upon them or they will remove their consent from those who establish or administer public policy.”

Sweden has also witnessed a significant shift in its migration policies over the past few years. Stung by criticism coming from both the political left and right, the Social Democrats, who regained power in the election of 1994, have moved cautiously in addressing the refugee issue (see Westin and Dingu-Kyrklund 1995). The Swedish government has sought to decrease the number of new arrivals and to hasten their integration into society. It has endeavoured to reduce the size of new refugee flows by utilizing a more narrow definition of refugee status than it had applied in the past. This new approach has succeeded in barring the admission of most new “economic refugees.” Stockholm has also sponsored new initiatives to encourage the repatriation of formerly admitted refugees. In addition, it has joined with several of its European Union partners in enforcing common visa regulations respecting third party nationals. Towards this end, the *Riksdag* formally approved Sweden’s membership in the Schengen Group in the spring of 1998 (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1998: 24).

The Swedish government has also initiated several new efforts to encourage refugees to move more directly into the centre of Swedish society. In 1998, it created a new Ministry of Integration with the goal of assisting refugees to acquire more quickly the necessary job skills and Swedish language training necessary to enter the marketplace. At the same time, it cut back on the amount of second language instruction and services it offered in the schools. While still maintaining its verbal commitment to policies of multiculturalism, the Swedish government has moved much more in the direction of an integrationist approach at the end of the decade (see Olson 1997).

### *Opening Up the Policy Debate*

At the end of the 1990s, we are witnessing increased public interest in matters related to migration and multiculturalism. As has been noted above, these issues have moved on to the political agendas of some of the most reputedly socially progressive societies in the world. They have been placed there, however, not primarily by the traditional advocates of social reform. Instead, they have been pushed forward by new populist political parties that have been critical of the social innovations that their governments have pursued over the past twenty years with respect to migrant admissions and settlement. How should one interpret this development? Is it something to be welcomed or something to be feared?

It has often been suggested that such an "opening up" of the migration debate is of questionable value and potentially dangerous. It has been contended by some that the political discussion of emotional issues like immigration and refugee settlement simply hardens positions and allows for the entrance of racist appeals. Others have argued that the politicization of migration issues puts political leaders and policy makers in an untenable position—there is no way they can satisfy both anti- and pro-immigrant pressure groups within their society. Still others contend that because of the ultimate ambivalence of most voters regarding migration issues, a political debate over the matter would be muted and inconclusive (see Guibernau and Rex 1997).

Nonetheless, several scholars in the field of migration studies have argued that there is considerable merit in "opening up" the debate on migration matters. They note that good public policy is rarely conceived in an atmosphere devoid of contending viewpoints and perspectives (see Westin 1995: 334). Furthermore, they suggest that lingering public unhappiness with migration policy is ultimately a greater threat to the implementation of effective policy than is direct opposition to it. In this regard, a bit of "turbulence" in the political system is preferable to festering silence (see Brox 1997). This may be particularly true for conflict-avoiding, consensual political systems like those of Canada and Sweden.

An open political debate on migration and multiculturalism matters may also ensure that the policy preferences of bureaucratic elites are not too readily substituted for the views of the broader general public. It has been noted by analysts of both the Canadian and Swedish migration

policy formulation processes that often there has been a marked unwillingness on the part of policy makers to recognize the fact that there exist a wide variety of public views on the desirability of continuing to follow established policies on migration and multiculturalism. Speaking of the Swedish case at mid-decade, Göran Rosenberg commented that: "The fact remains that the elite ideology has shunned public opinion and shunned the task of reconciling political and moral commitments with economic realities. Instead of being confronted, the issues and political choices were swept under the carpet" (Rosenberg 1995: 214). As long as this inward looking approach to public policy formulation continues, there will always be the danger that unheeded public dissatisfaction over migration matters can burst into more virulent racist attitudes and opinions.

### *Conclusion*

It is not an easy matter to determine the extent to which Canadians and Swedes of the contemporary era are truly committed to being members of an immigrant-receiving and multicultural society. On the one hand, much is made of the positive contributions and growing visibility of the "new immigrants" within their societies. On the other hand, it is equally apparent that the greater presence and stature on the part of immigrants and refugees have engendered some hostile reaction on the part of nativist groups in both Canada and Sweden. Both of these trends seem to have contributed to the evolution of their national migration policies over the last decade.

During this period of time, the Canadian and Swedish governments have had to wrestle with the reality that the general public seems quite uncertain as to how wide the door should be opened to new arrivals. The original vision of an inclusionist, welcoming society set forth in the 1970s has lost some of its appeal and promise in the 1990s. While still responding to external calls to validate principles of human rights and non-discrimination in their immigration policy formulation, both governments are feeling increasingly hard-pressed to respond to internal pressure to tailor their policies in a manner that is more sensitive to domestic social and economic criteria.

In such a charged atmosphere, the two governments have attempted to reconcile their "noble sentiments" toward immigration and multiculturalism with a harsh political reality. The virtues that they have

championed in the past are now not as widely held among either the Canadian or Swedish public. As a consequence, government leaders have attempted to choose their steps carefully, alternately committing themselves to still relatively broad immigration/refugee targets while at the same time advancing new measures to deal with the crime, unemployment and social unrest issues that may be associated in the public's mind with these new arrivals. It is a policy approach often characterized by some as "two steps forward—one step back."

Under these conditions it seems quite unlikely that either Canada or Sweden is again likely to take the lead in the development of new and innovative migration approaches in the new millennium. Their approach in the near future is likely to be far more defensive in character—preserving those elements of a multicultural approach that still seem to be in tune with popular sentiment—and revising or abolishing those which appear to garner little support among their respective publics. Both countries are also likely to feel additional pressure to harmonize their migration policies with their respective neighbours and regional partners.

As they enter a new decade, both Canadians and Swedes will need to consider more clearly how diverse a society they wish to live in. Migration policy options based upon a variety of multicultural and integrationist models abound. What is required for policy to be effective, however, is that there is some consensus within the sponsoring society over the ultimate goals and objectives. In the case of both Canada and Sweden, their recent political history suggests that this consensus on migration matters still needs to be established. Some honest, open, and direct discussion of these matters among members of each society might prove to be quite useful in attempting to establish such a consensus.

It is readily apparent that in the coming years both the Canadian and Swedish governments will need to improve their effectiveness in shaping and implementing a comprehensive migration policy. With issues related to migration and multiculturalism achieving new political salience in both countries, neither government can afford to move forward into the new century with only partially formulated and articulated plans. Nor can they move ahead without public support.

## NOTES

1. See, for instance, David Roberts, "Some Immigrant Groups Fare Badly, New Study Asserts," *Toronto Globe and Mail* (February 1, 1999); Marianne Björklund, "Utbildad invandrare ratas," *Dagens Nyheter* (February 27, 1999).

2. See, for instance, Andrew Phillips, "The Lesson of Vancouver Immigration Raises Fundamental Questions of Identity and Values," *Maclean's*, 107, no. 6 (February 7, 1994): 26–31; Ulf Bjereld and Marie Demker, "Skall Jag Tag Vara På Min Broder," in Sören Holmberg and Lennart Weibull, eds., *Opinionssamhället*, SOM rapport nr 20 (SOM—Institutet, Göteborgs Universitet, 1998): 159–171.

3. This is not a phenomenon solely associated with Canada and Sweden. See Hans-Georg Betz and Stefan Immerfall, eds., *The New Politics of the Right: Neo-Populist Parties and Movements in Established Democracies* (London: Macmillan, 1998).

4. Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Guilford Press, 1998), esp. Chapter 9, "Immigrant Politics": 231–259.

5. Lars Ljungmark, "The Push and Pull Factors Behind Swedish Emigration to America, Canada and Australia," in P. C. Emmer and M. Mörner, eds., *European Expansion and Migration: Essays on the Intercontinental Migration from Africa, Asia and Europe* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1992): 79–103.

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# Breaking the Frame: Idea and Image in Kjeld Abell's *The Blue Pekinese*

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ABSTRACT: The Danish dramatist Kjeld Abell (1901–61) has been described as a writer in revolt against “human loneliness, isolation and egotism.” In many of his plays, these negative forces are represented by lonely mansions, such as the Villa Mayerling in *Vetsera Does Not Bloom for Everyone* and the Villa Mågeskrig in *The Blue Pekinese*, by the frames of windows, doors, mirrors, paintings and photographs, which appear as images of narcissism and entrapment, and by the proscenium arch of the traditional picture-frame stage. In *The Blue Pekinese* (1954), Abell symbolizes the psychological withdrawal of his heroine Tordis Eck by her viking-gothic house situated on a Baltic island, which becomes the play's inner stage, and by various framed objects, such as a mirror in a Copenhagen café and an old photograph. The action then follows a breaking or dissolving of these frames as Tordis, helped by the other characters, frees herself from the past and discovers “the will to live.”

RÉSUMÉ: L'auteur dramatique danois Kjeld Abell (1901–61) a été décrit comme un écrivain en révolte contre la solitude, l'isolement et l'égotisme humains. Dans plusieurs de ses pièces, ces forces négatives sont représentées par des demeures solitaires, comme la Villa Mayerling dans *Vetsera ne fleurit pas pour tout le monde* et la Villa Mågeskrig dans *Le Pékinois bleu*, par les encadrements des portes, fenêtres, miroirs, peintures et photographies, qui apparaissent comme images de narcissisme et de prise au piège, et par l'arc du proscenium de la scène traditionnelle. Dans *Le Pékinois bleu* (1954), Abell symbolise le retrait psychologique de son héroïne Tordis Eck par sa maison du style gothique viking, située sur une île de la Baltique, qui devient la scène intérieure de la pièce, et par divers objets encadrés, comme le miroir d'un café de Copenhague et une vieille photographie. L'action représente ensuite le brisement ou la dissolution de ces cadres lorsque Tordis, à l'aide des autres personnages, se libère du passé et découvre la volonté de vivre.

“Hvorfor kommer I ikke og bor hos mig? Jeg er helt alene.” [Why don't you come and stay with me? I'm quite alone] (Abell, 1970, 18).<sup>1</sup> Tordis Eck's invitation to André and Marianne in the first act of Kjeld Abell's *The Blue Pekinese* (1954) means more than it says. She is “quite alone” in the conventional sense that no one is sharing her house, the Villa Mågeskrig (Gullcry) on a Baltic island called Iselø; but she is also dangerously lonely. The second sense is not unexpected in a work by Abell who, in Nils Kjærulf's words, is a dramatist in revolt against “ensomheden, isolationen og egoismen blandt mennesker” [human loneliness, isolation and egotism] (Kjærulf 1970: 129). His plays will often surprise us with startling images of loneliness, and their action is most typically an attempt to break down the barriers between human beings; witness this speech from the last act of *Vetsera Does Not Bloom for Everyone* (1950),<sup>2</sup> which “might well stand as a motto over all of Kjeld Abell's writing” (Marker 1976: 109):

Jeg tror paa det usynlige der er menneskene imellem. Det udsagte der paa én gang føles som en inspirerende velsignelse og en knugende forbandelse. Kunne vi gøre det usynlige i os synligt, ville forbandelsen langsomt miste sit fodfæste. Ingen ensomme behøvede at bygge borge af deres ensomhed. Og de borge, der er, vil bli'e revet ned.  
(Abell 1966: 53)

[I believe in the invisible bond between people. The unspoken which can at the same time feel like an inspiring blessing and a crushing curse. If we could make the invisible in us visible, the curse would slowly lose its foothold. No lonely people would need to build castles out of their loneliness. And the castles that exist would be pulled down.]

The castle frequently evoked in *Vetsera* is the hunting lodge at Mayerling, where Prince Rudolph of Austria shot his mistress, Maria Vetsera, before turning the gun on himself (Marker 1976: 99–100). It reappears as the doomed Villa Mågeskrig in the play. Tordis's Villa Mågeskrig is, however, Abell's most memorable example of a castle built out of loneliness. The place was willed to Tordis (Abell 1970: 16) by her husband's eccentric great aunt, Isabella de Creuith, in a spirit of revenge (Abell 1970: 105) against Tordis's father, “den præcise departementschef, det kølige medlem af utallige bestyrelser” [the precise cabinet minister, the disciplined member of innumerable committees], as André describes him (Abell 1970: 14). Isabella hoped or even knew that the curse of her own aristocratic loneliness would pass on to Tordis with the house: “Endelig er jeg klar over, hvem der skal være min arving, min arving til alt. Det skal du” [At last I know who will be my

heir, my heir to everything. It will be you] (Abell 1970: 36). The Villa Mågeskrig appears to be built in the style known as viking-gothic; André calls it "et vældigt skrummel med dragehoveder og saga-udskæringer, ikke et hus, men et levende væsen" [a huge rambling place with dragon-heads and carved images from the sagas, not a house, but a living creature] (Abell 1970: 18). Dominating the inner stage like the loft in Henrik Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* or Hedda Gabler's private alcove, Mågeskrig is the inviolable sanctum of Tordis's life: "Men Iselø, villa Mågeskrig, må ingen ta' fra mig. Her lever min frihed sit eget liv. Her ejer jeg noget, som kun jeg kan se. Noget usynligt, noget u håndgribeligt,—noget—" [But Iselø, the Villa Mågeskrig, no one may take them from me. My freedom lives its own life here. I own something here, which only I can see. Something invisible, something intangible,—something—] (Abell 1970: 22). André learns, almost too late, that her sanctuary is the demonic fulfilment of "den kostbare ensomhed, der holder alting på afstand" [that expensive loneliness that keeps everything at a distance] (Abell 1970: 86). Tordis tries to signal this to him in the first act's memory scene with, for example, that last "something," but it will take almost the entire play before Tordis succeeds in pulling down her castle aided by all the other characters and her own "will to live" (Abell 1970: 102).

Castles, lonely villas—those familiar gothic images of obsession and isolation—are often replaced in Abell's plays by various types of frames (Hye 1991: 48), symbolizing entrapment or voluntary withdrawal.<sup>3</sup> In his first work for the theatre, a ballet entitled *The Widow in the Mirror* (1934), Abell has his heroine trapped in both a picture-frame and a mirror, only to be rescued by a figure representing the true self she had all but lost in a stifling marriage. His plot outline in the programme clearly foreshadows ideas and images in his plays, especially *The Bue Pekinese*:

Enken kan ikke slippe Billedet, der spejler hendes Fortid, hun holder fast i den forgyldte Ramme, der tilsidst omslutter hende—hun stirrer i Spejlet og ser kun sig selv paa Baggrund af sin Tilværelses nydelige Ligegyldighed—det er ved at være for sent—Adagiobruden staar i den aabne Havelaage—Enken sprænger Spejlrammen og lever. (Abell 1934: 33)

[The Widow cannot escape the picture that reflects her past; she stays unmoving in the gilt frame that finally surrounds her—she stares in the mirror and sees only herself against the background of the charming emptiness of her exis-

tence—soon it will be too late—the Adagio-Bride stands in the open garden gate—the Widow breaks the mirror-frame and lives.]

In *The Melody That Got Lost* (1935), Larsen's parents appear at first inside the frame of "et kæmpemæssigt kabinetsfotografi" [a giant cabinet photograph] (Abell 1965: 23). The biblical Eve from *Eve Serves her Childhood* (1937) is part of "et meget stort billede af Adam og Eva under et træ" [a very large picture of Adam and Eve under a tree] (Abell 1955: 69), itself "imprisoned" in an art gallery. In the later plays, frames and framing become more sinister. In *Vetsera*, David's ancestors have posed "for et gammeldags fotografiapparat" [for an old-fashioned photographic apparatus] (Abell 1966: 7) between the pillars of his neo-classical villa, and the resulting pictures appear in the second act above the fireplace in an "imposante opmarch" [imposing line] (Abell 1966: 24). Like the ancestral portraits of Rosmersholm, they stand for a decaying aristocratic family that will end with the suicide of its last representative.

*The Blue Pekinese* is even more dominated by scenic and verbal frames; these can be divided into two groups: (1) the frames of mirrors, paintings, and photographs; and (2) the frames of doors and windows, the latter being associated with an image pattern of opacity and translucency, darkness and light.

In terms of real time and space, André sits for most of the play in the Café Bern under a mirror (Abell 1970: 12) which, initially at least, preserves its association with narcissism: "går hen til midterbordet, kaster et hurtigt blik i det store spejl over sofaen, lader en hånd gå hurtigt gennem håret" [he crosses to the centre table, casts a quick glance in the large mirror over the sofa, passes a hand quickly through his hair] (Abell 1970: 12). In a long confessional monologue from Part 2, Tordis speaks of her life as a dance towards a mirror:

Jeg dansede, dansede, tilsidst alene in en sal, der var tom. Det spejl, det spejl! —for enden af salen. Den trak som en afgrund. Jeg dansede, dansede, men spejlet var stærkest. Mod det spejl blev jeg knust. (Abell 1970: 79)

[I danced, danced, at last alone in an empty room. That mirror, that mirror! —at the end of the room. It drew me like an abyss. I danced, danced, but the mirror was the strongest. I was crushed against that mirror.]

Still trapped by the self-centred aestheticism that lost him Tordis in the first place, André describes her as "en fremmed, en fremmed mellem os, en person på et billede som vi betragtede udefra" [a stranger, a stranger



in our midst, someone in a picture we viewed from the outside] (Abell 1970: 38). Later he compares Tordis and Isabella to "to konverserende damer på et genrebillede" [two ladies in conversation in a genre painting] (Abell 1970: 56), and Tordis sees herself as: "Departementschefens datter. En portræt med baggrund. En baggrund jeg kunde ikke befri mig for" [The daughter of the cabinet minister. A portrait with background. A background from which I could not free myself] (Abell 1970: 78).

The first photograph in the play is even more sinister than Tordis's mirror. André has come to the café to pick up a piece of mail. Recognizing the handwriting on the envelope, he opens it to find "et gammeldags fotografi i postkortformat" [an old-fashioned photograph in the form of a postcard] (Abell 1970: 16) showing Isabella with her dog Dicky, the blue Pekinese. On the back of the card, along the bottom edge, Tordis has faintly penciled in the words, "Hvis jeg var digter" [If I were a poet] (Abell 1970: 17). The message and the card itself are an accusation and a suicide note. On his summer visit to Iselø, earlier in the year when the play takes place, André had sensed Tordis's need to be rescued from her castle of loneliness, but the nearest he could get to helping her were the conditional words which Tordis has written on the card:

TORDIS: Hvis du var digter?

ANDRÉ: Det lød ikke som et spørgsmål, hun stillede mig, snarere som et spørgsmål, hun stillede sig selv. En pause, en tøven. Så fortsatte hun.

TORDIS: Nar jeg engang er død ... skal du få det eneste billede jeg ejer af Tante Isabella og Dicky. Det er et gammelt fotografi i postkortformat. Så langt jeg husker tilbage, har det siddet hæftet fast med to knappenåle på den indvendige side af et falmet skaermbret i Tante Isabellas paklædningsværelse, og der sidder det endnu. Men du skal få det.

ANDRÉ: Skal jeg?

TORDIS: Ja, du.

ANDRÉ: Tonen var næsten aggressiv. (Abell 1970: 39)

[TORDIS: If you were a poet?

ANDRÉ: It didn't sound like a question she was asking me, rather a question she was asking herself. A pause, a hesitation. Then she continued.

TORDIS: When I am dead ... you shall have the only photograph I own of Aunt Isabella and Dicky. It's an old photograph in the form of a postcard. As long as I can remember, it's been firmly fixed by two pushpins to the inside of a faded folding screen in Aunt Isabella's dressing room, and it's fixed there still. But you shall have it.

ANDRÉ: I shall?

TORDIS: Yes, you.

ANDRÉ: Her tone was almost aggressive.]

Aggressive because André has failed to rescue her. He is not a poet, certainly not the Orpheus Tordis needs (Marker 1976: 113, 161). When Emily learns of Tordis's suicide attempt, she cries out: "Iselø er blevet til et helvede—et helvede, som jeg aldrig kan forlade" [Iselø has become a hell—a hell which I can never leave] (Abell 1970: 55). To understand André's mission to the island, we must see the place as a kind of underworld guarded by those dragons and of course a dog.<sup>4</sup>

The other photograph is of Tordis herself. One reason for her escape to Iselø is a loveless marriage: "I et udtalt had til sin far havde hun endelig giftet sig, giftet sig med den, der passede fa'ren" [Out of an unspoken hatred for her father, she had finally married, married the man who was her father's choice] (Abell 1970: 18). She now believes that her parents would prefer her suicide to the public shame of a divorce:

Om han gifter sig igen, det ændrer intet. Ingen skilsmisse er imellem. De beholder ham, de beholder os begge. Fra nu af har de en levende søn og en indrammet datter. Mit fotografi vil spejle sig i de blankpolerede mahogniflader, som en ufarlig spardame, der aldrig spår ulykke, kun bringer tryghed, fortsat tryghed—  
(Abell 1970: 70)

[If he marries again, it will change nothing. There will be no divorce in between. They will keep him, they will keep us both. From now on, they will have a living son and a daughter in a frame. My photograph will be reflected in those polished mahogany surfaces, like a harmless queen of spades who never foretells bad luck, but only brings security, continued security—]

In *The Melody That Got Lost*, entrapment by photograph is presented satirically in review style; twenty years later, the image is a tragic one. Tordis is the victim of her father's jealous possessiveness which has reified her into "en indrammet datter" [a daughter in a frame]. This twentieth-century Hedda Gabler had looked for freedom in a series of student affairs "bag sine forældres ryg, især ryggen på fa'ren" [behind her parents' backs, especially her father's] (Abell 1970: 13), but sex had not worked any better than Hedda's vine-leaves. Indeed, it is her seduction by Hansson the island's resident Don Juan—"To glas på et bord" [Two glasses on a table] (Abell 1970: 79)—that leads Tordis to attempt what she thinks of as "den fuldendte forbrydelse" [the perfect crime] (Abell 1970: 62).

If the Villa Mågeskrig is a castle, it is also a sanctuary. André calls it a cloister: "En fredlyst plet, De havde råd til at fredlyse med albuerum både til hav og himmel" [A hallowed spot you had the means to make inviolable with elbow room to sea and sky] (Abell 1970: 86). In much the same way, Tordis describes her marriage as "en lejlighed med så mange døre, man går ind og ud a', leger 'kommer fremmede', leger med glæde, bare man inderst inde bag alle døre ejer en dør, der kan lukkes og låses for den ensomhed, der er helt ens egen" [an apartment with just so many doors one can go in and out by, play 'postman's knock' behind, play gladly, just so long as one has, deep inside the apartment, behind all the other doors, one door that can be closed and locked on that loneliness which is quite one's own] (Abell 1970: 63). Immediately after describing this private security system, Tordis admits that it has become a trap:

For sent forstod jeg, at der er et mønster, et levende mønster der gror og blomstrer. Jeg så kun mig selv, min egen tråd, troede at der af den kunne formes et mønster, et selvstændigt mønster. En tråd kan behændigt føre ind i labyrinter, kun sjældent ud. Nu er det for sent. (Abell 1970: 64)

[I understood too late that there is a pattern, a living pattern that grows and flowers. I saw only myself, my own thread, believed that a pattern could be made out of it, a self-sufficient pattern. A thread can be useful to lead one into labyrinths, very rarely out. Now it is too late.]

Looked at in another way, her inner sanctum is now almost completely inviolable, as she lies in her upstairs bedroom on the verge of death from an overdose of sleeping tablets. This is her real time and place situation, just as André's is on the sofa below the mirror in the Café Bern.

Almost inviolable, but not quite. Having set out to commit the perfect crime (Abell 1970: 62), her will to live begins to send out coded messages for help in the form of clues: the postcard to André, two glasses on a table (Abell 1970: 77), an airline ticket to France (Abell 1970: 54). In the same way, though the action takes place during a night of storm and darkness, no window is completely opaque or dark. The telephone booth in the café, for example, has "sandblæste ruder" [sandblasted windows] (Abell 1970: 11), but these allow us to see André's gestures as he makes his urgent call to the island (Abell 1970: 44). When she was six, Tordis escaped through her "fængselsvindue på første sal" [prison window on the first floor] of the villa (Abell 1970: 35) for a fateful encounter with Isabella. Now she lies in a coma in

Isabella's old room on the same floor, but André is guided to the villa by "lys i et vindue på første sal" [a light in a window on the first floor] (Abell 1970: 42). This light comes from the Doctor's lamp and will return at intervals as a sign of hope:

ANDRÉ: Lyset i dit vindue brænder stadig.

TORDIS: Slip mig! Hvad vil du?

ANDRÉ: Skyggen på gardinet—

TORDIS: Nej, nej! — kald mig ikke tilbage. (Abell 1970: 67)

[ANDRÉ: The light in your window is still burning.

TORDIS: Let me go! What do you want?

ANDRÉ: The shadow on the curtain—

TORDIS: No, no! — don't call me back. ]

Only once, when Tordis comes close to death, is the window dark (Abell 1970: 80), but the Doctor's light returns and Tordis is saved: "Lysskæret på gardinet, doktoren, doktoren, din gamle ven, doktoren—kan du høre hans stemme?" [That gleam of light on the curtain, the Doctor, the Doctor, your old friend, the Doctor—can you hear his voice?] (Abell 1970: 104).

One other architectural image, though isolated, is important as a link between these mirrors, portraits, doors, and windows, and Abell's larger use of the proscenium arch and the inner stage. In the first scene on Iselø, when André watches Tordis leave with his wife Marianne, he sees them as: "To piger, der var piger i hver sin verden, to verdner adskilt af en usynlig glasmur" [Two girls, each in her own world, two worlds separated by an invisible glass wall] (Abell 1970: 26). The dramatist knew only too well that from the early nineteenth-century on, bourgeois drama had begun its retreat behind "the fictitious 'fourth wall'" (Hauser 1914: 408). The result was a picture-frame stage that housed increasingly realistic presentations watched by an audience increasingly separated from the theatre event—a process scribed by Abell in his 1935 essay on realism:

Prosceniumskanten, der før ha'de været en slags stor, bred døråbning, skuespillerne gik igennem for at møde publikum, blev nu en skarpt afskåret ramme, der med hænder og fødder anstrengte sig for at holde de to partier på hver side af rampen strengt adskilt. Teatret blev et billede, der med sin rigdom af korrekte detaljer intet overlod til publikum—publikum måtte ikke være en aktiv del af foretagendet. (Abell 1935: 192)

[The proscenium arch, which earlier on had been a kind of large, wide doorway the actors went through to meet the public, now became a sharply delineated

frame that strained with all its might to keep the two parties on either side of the footlights strictly separate. Theatre became a picture that with its wealth of accurate details left nothing to the public—the public was not allowed to be an active part of the proceedings.]

Born in 1901, Abell grew up as it were with film, but unlike many of his contemporaries, he regarded the movies as more of a blessing than a curse for the theatre. By appropriating realism, spectacle, and the picture-frame, film could be said to have saved theatre from itself:

...den store stygge filmsulv gjorde i virkeligheden teatret den vennetjeneste, som teatrets egne venner ikke havde turdet yde. Filmen lagden råt og brutalt en stor klam hånd over hele det udvendige apparat, som aldrig har passet til teatrets virkelige væsen. Filmen gav teatret en mulighed for at leve videre. Det var filmen, der viste teatret, at det igen burde blive rigtigt teater. (Abell 1939: 222)

[the big bad film-wolf in reality did theatre the friendly favour which theatre's own friends had not dared to provide. Film coarsely and brutally laid a big clammy hand over the whole external apparatus which has never belonged to theatre's real being. Film gave theatre a chance to survive. It was film that showed theatre that it should become real theatre again.]

In his postwar essay collection, *Theatre Sketches in Easter Weather*, Abell was to sum up "real theatre" as "den frie tankes fantastiske fristed" [the free imagination's fantastic sanctuary] (Abell 1948: 90).<sup>5</sup>

If *The Blue Pekinese* is Abell's strongest play, it is because of its sustained tension between symbol and reality, between the dramatist's exercise of free imagination and his awareness that he is writing for the picture-frame stage.<sup>6</sup> In preparing his dramatic revolt against "human loneliness, isolation and egotism," he begins by making ironic use of the "invisible glass wall" which his public had been trained to accept as *the* convention of their theatre. The scene in the telephone booth is instructive here. As he makes his call to Iselø, André's voice is drowned by the storm: "kun på hans minespil og hænder kan man se at han taler" [we can only tell that he is speaking from the movements of his face and hands] (Abell 1970: 44). The actor playing André—originally, and by all accounts definitively, Mogens Wieth—is reduced to a kind of shadow puppet. At the same time, André is actively seeking to make contact with the island in an attempt to save Tordis's life. The image is one of isolation and yet contains a powerful sense of an "invisible bond" between the characters.

In much the same way, the larger frames used by Abell create an initial sense of extreme distancing. The proscenium arch frames the

Café Bern. This in turn frames Iselø, the play's inner stage; but there is another frame inside this frame: "Lyset falder til højre, lidt til baggrunden, på et lavt antydet stendige, der indrammer den åbne indkørsel til Villa Mågeskrig" [The light falls to the right, a little in the background, on the suggestion of a low stone dike that frames the open driveway to the Villa Mågeskrig] (Abell 1970: 73). In one instance, Abell, an experienced screenplay writer, uses a filmic close-up to accentuate the distancing effect. As André desperately tries to get through to the Doctor on the telephone, the sound effects and lighting seem to confirm the futility of his attempt:

*(stormlydene blander sig med lyden af brodsøer—lyset falder på en væg med fotografier arrangeret omkring et væg-apparat—telefonen kimer og kimer, men ingen ta'r den)*

Svares der ikke? Det er umuligt froken. De kan da sige Dem selv, at nogen må svare, enten fyrmesteren eller Hansson. Prøv igen, froken, bliv ved, bliv ved.

*(igen kimer telefonen uden at blive taget, langsomt forsvinder væggen i mørke og storm, men telefonen høres et par gange, så forsvinder også den ...)*

(Abell 1970: 44–45)

*[(the storm noises mingle with the sound of breakers—the light falls on a wall with photographs arranged round a wall telephone—the telephone rings and rings, but no one picks up the receiver)*

No answer? That's impossible, miss. You know yourself that someone must answer, either the lighthouse keeper or Hansson. Try again, miss, keep on trying, keep on trying.

*(the telephone rings again without being picked up, the wall slowly disappears in the darkness and storm, but the telephone rings a couple of times more, then it too fades...)]*

The unanswered telephone framed by photographs is a surreal image of alienation, but as Johan Faltin Bjørnsen among others has shown, Abell was temperamentally opposed to the "angst" school of much mid-twentieth century writing:<sup>7</sup>

Det sentrale tema i *Den blå Pekingesser* er at mangel på kontakt med medmennesker fører til selvmord og at redningen er "at komme ud av sig selv" og "leve med". For Abell var det noe grunnleggende at menneskene skulle og kunne hjelpe hverandre til å leve.

Det som Abell gir uttrykk for i sitt stykke er den polare motsetning til det diktere som T. S. Eliot, Jean Cocteau og Jean Anouilh bekjenner seg til, nemlig ensomhet og angst, til døden og ikke til livet. (Bjørnsen 1978: 114)

[The central theme in *The Blue Pekinese* is that the lack of contact with one's fellow human beings leads to suicide and that the solution is "to come out

of oneself" and "live with others." For Abell, it was an essential rule that people should and could help each other to live.

What Abell expresses in his play is the polar opposite of what writers like T.S. Eliot, Jean Cocteau, and Jean Anouilh focus on, namely loneliness and angst, to death and not to life.]

In saying no to postwar angst, Abell was also rejecting the closed world of Ibsen's modern tragedies. In his exemplary study of Hedda Gabler, John Northam demonstrates how Ibsen's framing of the stage image prefigures the play's tragic action: "In the centre of the view, framed by its own frame, by the wide doorway and by the proscenium arch, a portrait of an elderly man in general's uniform hangs on the wall of the inner room" (Northam 1973: 147). There is no exit for Hedda Gabler. She is "smashed" against that portrait, in much the same way that Tordis was smashed against her mirror. That, however, is only one phase in Tordis's story. Abell uses his *mise-en-abîme* in an opposite way to Ibsen. Where Hedda Gabler is drawn towards her death in the inner stage, with the other characters and the audience remaining outside the frames, Abell allows his audience to follow André into the inner stage which does not remain an inviolable sanctuary.

The very first stage direction indicates that this is to be a play about the possibility of change:

En café i yndefuld 80'er-stil malet på florstæpper, der dels kan forsvinde, dels efter ønske gennemlyses og åbne for helt nye udsyn, helt nye virkninger.

(Abell 1970: 11)

[A café in elegant 80's style painted on gauze curtains that can at times disappear, at times according to one's wishes, become translucent and open up completely new prospects, completely new effects.]

This is an artistic manifesto, as well as a blueprint for the set designer. Abell's "efter ønske" [according to one's wishes] does more than suggest a fluid, impressionistic scenography; it is a declaration of the dramatist's belief that individual wishing and desire can effect beneficent change so long as they are free from "loneliness, isolation and egotism."

As the action proceeds, this dreamlike dissolution of frames, walls, doors, and windows, encourages the audience to break down the invisible glass wall framed by the proscenium arch and follow André into the "fantastic sanctuary" of the inner stage. The Danish "fristed," literally "free place," helps us to grasp the author's intentions more clearly. The Villa Mågeskrig is a sanctuary for Tordis in the sense of an inviolable

retreat from her father, her husband, and the outside world. However, the Villa and the whole island also turn into "free places" where the "will to live" of author, character, and audience can create change "efter ønske." Even the mirror becomes a symbol of communication rather than entrapment:

ANDRÉ: Du glemmer, hvor jeg sidder.

TORDIS: Nej, på café Bern. Men fra din sofa under spejlet har du ingen magt over ham [the Doctor], kun magt over mig.

ANDRÉ: Fra min sofa under spejlet—hvad ser du i det spejl?

TORDIS: Hvad jeg ser? Det, jeg kender. Guldlister om et vægfelt, et par tændte lampetter, en gammeldags stumtjener og halvt skjult bag den—

*(griber André i armen)*

Telefonen i boksen! Den ringer, André. Du har rejst dig i et spring. Himlen være lovet. Preislers jubilæum. Det var ikke til dig.

ANDRÉ: Men næste gang eller næste igen, er det til mig. (Abell 1970: 68–69)

[ANDRÉ: You forget where I'm sitting.

TORDIS: No, in the Café Bern. But from your sofa under the mirror, you have no power over him [the Doctor].

ANDRÉ: From my sofa under the mirror—what do you see in the mirror?

TORDIS: What do I see? What I know. Gold mouldings round a wall, a couple of lit bracket lamps, an old-fashioned coat-rack, and half-hidden behind that—*(she grabs André's arm)*

The telephone in the booth! It's ringing, André. You've jumped to your feet. Thank God. Preisler's anniversary. It wasn't for you.

ANDRÉ: But next time or the time after that, it will be for me.]

An epitome of Abell's dramatic method, this passage strongly supports H. C. Branner's claim that Abell was the first Danish dramatist who "ophævede naturalismens love for tid og sted og lod os se det sceniske nu i dets sammenhæng med fortid og fremtid" [canceled the naturalistic rules of time and place, and let us see the scenic present in its connection with the past and the future] (Branner 1961: 164). In reality, Tordis and André are separated by sea and storm, and Tordis herself is near death, the Doctor at this point being unaware of her attempt at "the perfect crime". Yet both characters are seen together in neutral territory between the Villa and the café engaged in a passionate debate that literally "gælder liv og død" [is a matter of life and death] (Abell 1970: 45), as André has told the operator on the island exchange. The situation is "fantastic": Tordis can no more see the telephone booth reflected in the café mirror than André can be on Iselø; yet the psychology of the dialogue is as realistic in terms of plot and retrospective action as an



equivalent sequence from one of Ibsen's later plays. The difference may be that Abell's characters exist rather more in that "atmosphere of the soul" which Maurice Maeterlinck discovered in *The Master Builder* (Maeterlinck 1897: 116).

Where Ibsen persuades us that his inner stages represent a kind of Greek fatality, a closed place of sacrifice, Abell's Iselø and the Villa Mågeskrig grow translucent, "efter ønske," as his hero and heroine discover the invisible bond between them. This kind of optimism goes against the grain of the Ibsen-Strindberg tradition as that is generally perceived. A recent review of a new Norwegian play begins with this statement: "It's almost a theatrical tautology: Scandinavian drama is oppressive, dark and brooding" (Posner 1999: C2). *The Blue Pekinese* is an important corrective to this widely held opinion. There is sufficient strength and darkness in the play, but Abell's purpose was to subvert the "oppressive" and "brooding" tradition that had dominated serious drama for so long. He writes, not tragedy, but dark romance; and in an era that has seen numerous successful productions of Shakespeare's once neglected dark romances such as *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*, which put comparable demands on the imagination of directors, designers, actors, and audiences, *The Blue Pekinese* is surely worthy of reinvestigation and revival.

## NOTES

1. All quotations from *The Blue Pekinese* are taken from *Den blå Pekingeser*. Ed. Nils Kjærulf. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1970. Translations from Abell's works and from the Danish and Norwegian critics cited are my own. *The Blue Pekinese* premiered on 16 December 1954 at The Royal Theatre in Copenhagen. It was directed by John Price, and designed by Erik Nordgreen, with music composed by Niels Viggo Bentzon. Mogens Wieth and Bodil Kjer starred as André and Tordis Eck. Archive photographs of the production suggest a balletic grace and power in the actors' movements, which would have added to the sense of Iselø being a "fantastic sanctuary." Abell began his theatre career as a designer and choreographer for the ballet. I am indebted to the Royal Theatre's Archive and Library for supplying me with copies of photographs from the premiere of *The Blue Pekinese*.

2. *Vetsera blomstrer ikke for enhver* (1950) is the second of an unofficial trilogy of plays written against suicide. The other two are *Dage på en sky* (1947) [Days on a Cloud] and *Den blå Pekingeser* (1954).

3. In his valuable essay on Abell's theatre, Allen E. Hye (1991) notes that the dramatist's "favourite symbols are picture frames, panes of glass, and walls as representations of oppression, and mirrors, eyes, and the dance as forces of life and liberation" (48). I would argue that mirrors are *initially* images of entrapment in *The Blue Pekinese*. Hye mentions these symbols at the end of his essay as material for "a separate study in itself," but does not examine them in any further detail.

4. Erik Nordgreen provided a cover illustration for the play's first edition (Abell 1954), which showed the blue Pekinese as a Chinese dragon; Kjærulf interprets this as "a symbol of spirit in the universe, an all-embracing sacred principle" (Kjærulf 1970: 137).

5. I have adopted Marker's fine rendering of this definition (1976: 95).

6. "The continual, fluid interplay in the stage picture between André's café environment and the suggestive surrealist elements of Iselø's unearthly dreamscape that impinge on it becomes in itself a large-scale visual metaphor for the thematic tension between vision and reality in the play" (Marker 1976: 114).

7. See also Tage Hind (1961: 133) and Elias Bredsdorff (1961: 59).

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