

The International Grieg Society
Schæffergården, 11 August, 2011

Opening address:
John Bergsagel (Copenhagen)

“... an indefinable longing drove me towards Copenhagen”
(Grieg to Iver Holter, 9 February, 1897)

In a letter to his friend, the Norwegian composer and conductor Iver Holter, dated 9 February, 1897, Edvard Grieg wrote “... an indefinable longing drove me towards Copenhagen.”¹ He was referring to the feeling that overwhelmed him when in 1862, at the age of 19, he prepared to leave the Leipzig Conservatory, but it appears to have remained with him and caused him to keep returning to the Danish capital throughout his life. It has been estimated that Edvard Grieg spent altogether some ten years of his life in Copenhagen.² I have not attempted to make such a calculation myself, but ten years is perhaps not an unreasonable estimate. It was in any case quite a long time and if the estimate is correct, it means that Grieg lived nearly a fourth part of his mature life – that is, after having completed his studies at the conservatory in Leipzig in 1862 until his death in 1907 – in the Danish capital. It is scarcely surprising, then, that the question should be asked – on the internet, of course – “What did Edvard Grieg do in Copenhagen Denmark”?

Ill. 1: “A good question!”

¹ “... en ubestemmelig længsel drev mig mod Kjøbenhavn.” *Edvard Grieg, Brev i udvalg 1862-1907*, I, ed. F. Benestad (Oslo 1998), p.446.

² The estimate is made by Christopher Follett in an article on Grieg’s contacts with Denmark at <http://www.grieg07.com/index.php?page=74&show=127&PHPSESSID=0cb64c3970e21ac776a030abd0e1eb2b>

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Lack of breath.

It is what might be called “a good question” and of course it is a question that has been asked many times before – indeed, it is implicit in the theme of the present conference, which happily this year is being held in Copenhagen. I should like to take this opportunity to thank the Society for doing me the honour of inviting me to give the introductory address.

Though the website on which the question is asked is called “Answers” – and strangely frivolous answers have been given to certain other questions, as can be seen – no answer is given to this important question. The lack is not so serious, however, as numerous answers have been often given in the past and I have no doubt that others will be forthcoming in the course of this conference. Grieg’s activities during his numerous periods of residence in Copenhagen are well documented: It was here that he met his heroes, Gade and Hartmann, the leading representatives of “Nordic music”; here that he made and cultivated life-long friendships with Danish cultural personalities; and it was in Copenhagen that he fell in love with and married his cousin, Nina Hagerup. Above all, in Copenhagen he enjoyed the cultural atmosphere of Scandinavia’s only cosmopolitan city, where he was in contact with the contemporary world at large, where he could visit exhibitions, go to the theatre and the opera, attend concerts and, not least, enjoy an environment in which he felt inspired to create his own music. It was in Copenhagen that he composed some of his finest works, such as the Piano Concerto, and before he was taken up by the firm of C.F. Peters in Leipzig much of his

music (including the music to Ibsen's "Peer Gynt") was published in Copenhagen and here it was performed before an appreciative public, often with himself as either soloist or conductor.

All this is fairly familiar and need hardly be repeated, so perhaps "What did Edvard Grieg do in Copenhagen Denmark?" is not such a "good question" after all. But what if instead the question were asked slightly differently: not "What did Edvard Grieg *do* in Copenhagen?", but "What was Edvard Grieg doing in *Copenhagen*?" Though it seems almost the same, idiomatically this means something quite different – not WHAT was he doing in Copenhagen, but WHY would he want to do it in Copenhagen? – a question that implicitly asks, how did Grieg feel about Denmark? Now this is a more complicated issue, given the historical and political circumstances that obtained in Scandinavia in the second half of the 19th century.³

There was, of course, nothing unusual about a Norwegian choosing to live in Copenhagen – after all, Edvard Grieg's uncle, his mother's brother Herman D. Hagerup, father of his wife, Nina, lived in Copenhagen with his family for many years. A more famous instance of a Norwegian's long-term residence in Copenhagen is that of Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754).

III. 2: Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754)

³ See, for example, Ole Feldbæk, "Griegs Danmark og Norge" in *Musik & forskning* 19 (1993-94), pp. 11-22.



Like Grieg, Holberg was born in Bergen, but in 1702 he was sent to Copenhagen to study at the university. After completing his studies in theology and, among other things, spending a couple of years in Oxford, he returned in 1708 not to Norway but to Copenhagen and never saw his native land again. He held in succession three professorships at the University of Copenhagen, but he is most famous for having laid the foundations of Danish and Norwegian theatre with a remarkable series of 31 comedies, which have earned him the title “the Father

of Scandinavian theatre”. He wrote much else, of course, including a remarkable *Description of Denmark and Norway* (1729), which contains some perceptive observations concerning national character and characteristics – both positive and negative – that seem even today to have a certain validity. He says, for example: “Copenhagen has become one of the most expensive places in Europe to live in”⁴. He is as right now as he was then, but I wonder if he would be proud or embarrassed to know that in a recent survey Oslo has surpassed Copenhagen in this regard? When treating of nationality he always refers to himself as Norwegian, of course, but never for that reason appears to regard himself as a foreigner in Denmark. On this subject he is quite clear when he says in *A Description of Denmark and Norway*: “As for the Norwegians, seeing that they live in a different climate, they differ greatly from the Danes, both in humour [mood] and customs: however this difference does not prevent a perfect union and agreement between both these nations and ever since the illustrious union of Denmark and Norway became a fact [in 1380]⁵ they have been regarded as one people.”⁶ This degree of unity was possible because the two nations shared essentially the same language – which is not to say that there was no difference in their manner of speaking it. In his autobiographical memoir (in Latin), *Ad Virum Perillustum* *** (1728), Holberg recalls that once (it would have been about 1712), while walking along the Danish coast from Copenhagen to Elsinore, he was taken into custody by a soldier on suspicion, presumably because of his accent, of being a Swedish spy, despite his protest that he was, as he says, the soldier’s “countryman”.⁷ He was soon released with apologies and he uses the incident as an illustration of the difficulties put in the way of travellers by officious authorities, for, as Jens Kr. Andersen has observed, his speech would not have been regarded as more strange (even today) than if he had come to Copenhagen from one of the Danish provinces.⁸

Then there was “The Norwegian Society”, which at its peak had a membership of

⁴ Ludvig Holberg, *Dannemarks og Norges Beskrivelse* (1729): “Kiøbenhavn er bleven een af de kostbareste stæder i Europa at leve udi.”

⁵ In 1380 the young Oluf II Håkonsen, who in 1375 had succeeded his grandfather, King Valdemar IV Atterdag, as King of Denmark, became, on the death of his father, King Håkon VI Magnusson, also King of Norway. During his minority, his mother, Queen Margrethe, ruled as regent and when the young king died prematurely in 1387 she became *de facto* ruler of Denmark and Norway – and from 1389 also of Sweden – until her death in 1412. Gustav Vasa took Sweden out of the Kalmar Union in 1523, while Denmark and Norway continued as “twin kingdoms” until 1814.

⁶ *Dannemarks og Norges Beskrivelse*, (op.cit.) p.35: “Hvad sig anbelanger de Norske, da, saasom de leve under et andet Clima, saa differere de meget fra de Danske baade i humeur og sæder: Dog hindrer den forskiel ikke, at der jo er en fuldkommen foreening og overeensstemmelse imellem begge disse nationer, og have de alletider siden den navnkundige foreening blev sluttet imellem Dannemark og Norge, været anseede som eet folk.”

⁷ *Ad Virum Perillustum* *** (1728): “Jeg stoed da imod, forsikrede på Troe og Love, at jeg var hans Landsmand”.

⁸ Jens Kr. Andersen, “Forfatterportræt – Ludvig Holberg” in *Arkiv for dansk litteratur*, online at http://adl.dk/adl_pub/fportraet/cv/FpPdf.xsql?nnoc=adl_pub&ff_id=5: “For samtiden var Holberg i København ikke mere fremmed, end hvis han var kommet fra en (også i dag) dansk provins.”

about 120 Norwegians living in Copenhagen. It was founded in 1772 to cultivate the work of Ludvig Holberg and the principles of classicism represented by Horace and had as its central figure the gifted poet Johan Herman Wessel (1742-1785).

III. 3: Eilif Peterssen (1892), “En aften i Det norske Selskab” [An evening at The Norwegian Society].



Inspired by the example of the American and French revolutions, the Society was somewhat more patriotically motivated than Holberg had been. Alongside its literary and social interests, it nurtured the ambition that Norway should have a university of its own and after this objective had been achieved in 1811 the Society was dissolved in 1813. The following year, 1814, as a consequence of the defeat of Napoleon, the ties that had bound Norway and Denmark for 434 years were broken by the Treaty of Kiel, in accordance with which Norway was ceded to Sweden.

It is important to bear in mind that the union between Norway and Denmark was not the result of aggression or conflict but of normal and natural dynastic process. In principle the two nations coexisted equally under one sovereign, but the location of the royal residence and seat of administration in Copenhagen inevitably gave Denmark certain advantages, which became more apparent and more keenly felt with the passage of time. When the Union came into being in 1380 the population of Norway was probably not much more than 100,000 people, spread out over a country that even today is one of the most thinly populated in Europe.⁹ At the dissolution of the Union in 1814 this had grown to 885,000¹⁰ – thus still less than a million and still little urbanized, but sufficiently large nevertheless for the want of the

⁹ The official estimate for the year 1500 is 140,000, according to *Statistics Norway*.

¹⁰ *Statistics Norway*: 30 April 1815: 885,431.

cultural institutions associated with nationhood, such as a university, to begin to be felt, as we have seen. The population of Denmark was perhaps not much greater, but the country is smaller and more compact, settlement was consequently more urbanized, with at least one major city of international consequence (Copenhagen), and geographically Denmark was more closely in contact with the countries of continental Europe. When in 1479 King Christian I was granted papal permission for the establishment of a university in Copenhagen, it was, of course, a university to serve both of his kingdoms. Inevitably, however, the rise of national romanticism at the end of the 18th century was accompanied by an increasingly urgent desire on the part of Norwegians for national independence.

How did this affect the relationship between Norway and Denmark? After the events of 1814 Denmark ceased to be a part of the problem as far as independence was concerned; Norway's demands for national independence had now to be addressed to King Carl XIII of Sweden. Happily, the long coexistence with Denmark was not more resented than that the representatives of the Norwegian people gathered in Eidsvoll, taking advantage of the interregnum between Denmark and Sweden in 1814, should elect the Danish vice-regent in Norway, Prince Carl Frederik, to be the first king of an independent Norway. Unfortunately, he was obliged to abdicate this honour after only five months in order to avoid bloodshed in a hopeless situation and the throne of Norway thus returned to the Kings of Sweden: Carl XIII, Carl XIV Johan, Oscar I, Carl XV and finally Oscar II. However, when independence was finally achieved in 1905 and a referendum had rejected a republican form of government in favour of the restoration of the monarchy, it was again a Danish prince, Carl, who was acclaimed by the Norwegian people at his coronation in Trondheim Cathedral, at which he took the name of Haakon VII.

Though Norway failed to achieve full independence in 1814, the constitution that was adopted at Eidsvoll was allowed to remain in force during the period of union with Sweden. This remarkable document provided a proud basis on which ripening national feelings could build, for what was needed now, it was felt, was to establish and assert a national identity. This was a mission that romantic artists were prepared to take upon themselves, whether poets, painters, playwrights or musicians. The romantic concept of "art as national expression" is epitomized in a characteristic story that is told of Ole Bull: some days after a festive evening in the Scandinavian Society in Rome in 1874 a disagreement arose between Ole Bull and his old friend Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. Bjørnson had strong Nordic sympathies while Ole Bull was exclusively Norwegian and anti-Scandinavian and he thought that Swedes

and Danes should not be admitted to the Norwegians' 17th of May celebration. Early one morning, after a spirited discussion of this issue the previous evening, Bjørnson sent his 14 ½-year-old son Bjørn, who was Ole Bull's god-son, around to his hotel with a letter. Ole Bull was still in bed, handsome and imposing with his snow-white hair and clad in his lace-edged nightshirt. He read the letter, pursed his lips and muttered: "It is I who am right all the same!" He raised himself a little up in bed and looked at the boy: "Do you know what Norway is, Bjørn?" Receiving no answer, he got out of bed and took out his violin: "Sit down and you shall hear what country you are from" – and so he played to Bjørn for more than an hour, Norwegian melodies and moods, at last breaking off with the words: "Now you can go home and say to your father that I have given *you* the answer to *his* letter."¹¹

Grieg was never as nationalistic as Bull; as he wrote in a letter to Iver Holter, he wanted to be "not exactly Norwegian, even less 'Norwegian-Norwegian', but – myself."¹² However, national feelings were an essential part of that "himself" and it is this that Grieg wished to convey to his Danish friend Gottfred Matthison-Hansen in a letter in which he tells of his plan to return to Norway after his marriage, "where I shall live and work. Yes, it is a strange thought, a strange mixture of delight and wistfulness. It is my enthusiasm for the national idea that leads me to reconcile myself with my native land as a place for an artist to make his home – but in dark moments my future is nevertheless covered with dark clouds because of my total isolation and lack of outside influences up here."¹³ The "dark clouds" proved to be real enough and they were slow to disperse. In the application that he made, jointly with Johan Svendsen, in 1874 for an annual state grant, he refers to the situation as he experienced it in what he described as "our developing artistic environment, where we still have none of the institutions that in foreign countries have a stimulating effect on the artist's

¹¹ To make a long story short I tell it here more or less as Francis Bull summarized it in his essay "Ole Bull og Norge", reprinted in Francis Bull, *Landet og litteraturen* (Oslo 1949), p. 152: "nogen dager etter oppsto det en uenighet: Bjørnson hadde sterke nordiske sympatier, mens Ole Bull var norsk-norsk og antiskandinav, og han mente at svensker og dansker ikke burde få adgang til nordmennenes 17. mai-fest. Tidlig en morgen etter en større diskusjon i den anledning sendte Bjørnson sin 14 ½ års gamle sønn *Bjørn*, Ole Bulls gudsønn, opp på hotellet med et brev. Ole Bull lå ennå i sengen, vakker og verdig, med sitt snehvite hår og sin kniplingskantede nattskjorte. Han leste brevet, og knep munnen sammen: 'Det er nå meg der har rett allikevel da!' Så reiste han seg litt opp i sengen og så på gutten: 'Vet du hva Norge er Bjørn?' Han fikk ikke svar, steg ut av sengen og tok fiolinen frem: 'Sett deg, så skal du høre hva land du er fra,' – og så spilte han for Bjørn i over en time, norske toner og stemninger, og brøt til slutt av med de ord: 'Nå kan du gå hjem og si til din far at jeg har svart *deg* på *hans* brev.'" See also H. Herresthal, *Ole Bull. Drømmen om udødelighet* (Oslo 2010), pp. 189-190.

¹² Grieg to Iver Holter, 9. Feb. 1897: "Jeg vilde gjerne være ikke netop norsk, endnu mindre norsk-norsk, men – mig selv." *Brev i Utvalg* (op.cit.), p.446.

¹³ Grieg to G. Matthison-Hansen, 12 Dec. 1866, in *Edvard Grieg, Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, selected and edited by Finn Benestad, translated by William H. Halvorson (Columbus, Ohio, 2000), p. 490. "...hvor jeg skal leve og virke. Ja, det er en forunderlig tanke, forunderlig blanding af Fry og Vemod. Det er min Begejstring for den nationale Idé, der bringer mig til at forsone mig med mit Fædreland, som Opholdsted for en Kunstner, men I mørke Øjeblikke staar desuagtet min Fremtid skybetinget, og det paa Grund af den totale Isolation og Mangel paa Paavirkning heroppe." *Brev i Utvalg* (op.cit.), p. 135.

imagination; for we lack the fundamental support that is to be found in a national opera with an orchestra and chorus corresponding to the requirements of art and of our time.”¹⁴ Towards the end of his life, in 1905, when independence had been achieved, he assessed the significance to himself of the long struggle for independence that was now a reality. On New Year’s Eve 1905 he wrote in his diary: ”Now the year 1905 – the great year – goes to rest, and I part from it with deep gratitude because I have experienced it! And yet, without the youthful dreams that this year has made real, my art would not have had its proper background. The longings have transformed my personal experiences into tones. Had the 7th of June come in my youth, what would have happened?”¹⁵ What does he mean by ”the proper background”? – obviously, in the first place, that his art had been given shape and purpose by the national struggle, but at the same time, surely, that the national struggle had endowed his art with significance – in the work of defining a national identity, for example – in a way that would not otherwise have been possible. In other words, he was the right man in the right place at the right time. However, such a destiny can be claustrophobic and his survival – and development – required that from time to time he should be able to look out on other horizons, such as Germany and Italy and, above all, Denmark.

While *political* independence was to be sought from Sweden, there were some in Norway who felt that action needed to be taken to achieve *cultural* independence from Denmark. National romanticism insisted upon the establishment of a national identity and in the view of some this was impossible as long as the language used was shared with another nation. The national romantic movement in Norway became thus a house divided against itself; whereas on the one hand a movement called “Scandinavianism” strove to strengthen the ties between Norway, Denmark and Sweden, building on the common origin and related languages and mythologies of the Scandinavian peoples, another group, in which Ivar Aasen was a leading figure, was convinced that a distinctive national identity could only be achieved by suppressing the Dano-Norwegian language that for centuries had been the language of government administration, education and literature in Norway and replacing it with a supposed “native” language created by Aasen on the basis of various local (mostly West Norwegian) dialects. This controversial issue, put forward in the 1850s, has divided Norway

¹⁴ *Edvard Grieg, Diaries, Articles, Speeches*, translated and edited by F. Benestad and W.H. Halvorson (Columbus, Ohio, 2001) p. 64. The original Norwegian is in *Edvard Grieg, Artikler og taler*, ed. Øystein Gaukstad (Oslo, 1957), p. 237: “i vore begyndende kunstforhold, hvor endnu intet af det findes, som i udlandet virker befrugtende på den skabende kunstners fantasi, fordi vi mangle den grundstøtte, der ligger i en national opera med et orkester og et kor, svarende til kunstens og vor tids fordringer.”

¹⁵ *Edvard Grieg, Diaries...* (op.cit.) p.106. “Nu går Året 1905, det store År, tilhvile og jeg skilles fra det i dyb Taknemlighed, fordi jeg fik opleve det! Og dog: uden de Ungdomsdrømme, som dette År har virkeliggjort, havde min Kunst ikke havt sin rette Baggrund. Længslerne har formet Personligheden i Toner. Havde den 7de Juni kommet i min Ungdom, hvad så?” *Edvard Grieg, Dagbøger*, ed. Finn Benestad (Bergen 1993), p. 105.

ever since and resulted in the recognition of two official languages now known as “Book-language” and “New Norwegian”.¹⁶ The “language struggle” is still, after 150 years, a mine-field which even angels fear to tread and I have no intention of venturing into it one step further than necessary. However, the situation that arose between Norway and Denmark after 1814, of two countries each going its own way despite the ties of a long common history and the bond of a shared language, was not without precedent and the comment attributed to Bernard Shaw about the United States and Great Britain being two countries *separated* by a common language (and, in the view of some, growing further apart year by year) is a reminder that the languages of Norway and Denmark might very well have developed in accordance with the needs of national self-expression through a natural process and without governmental intervention. Thirty years after his romantic infatuation with Hardanger this was also Grieg’s conclusion when he said: “A language forms and develops itself in accordance with quite other laws than those of force.”¹⁷ Every country has a variety of dialects, which, in addition to being transmitted orally in folksongs and tales, has sometimes been used to make valuable contributions to written literature, but somehow or other, out of this variety one more or less authorized official form of the language emerges and is recognized as the approved literary standard. In Norway this was Dano-Norwegian and after more than four hundred years of coexistence Dano-Norwegian could hardly be said to be a foreign language in either Norway or Denmark and indeed it is worth remembering that in Denmark the greatest single influence on the shaping of Danish into a literary language had come from a Norwegian, Ludvig Holberg. Furthermore, several of the greatest masters of the common language in the second half of the 19th century were Norwegians: Bjørnson, Ibsen, Alexander Kielland, Jonas Lie and Knut Hamsun, whose books were for the most part published in Denmark. It is not to be wondered at, then, that, in alarm at the campaign being waged to suppress Dano-Norwegian and impose Ivar Aasen’s *landsmål* (=rural Norwegian) as the nation’s official language, Bjørnson should write in a letter to Ibsen (16 Dec. 1867): “Hold on firmly to Denmark, don’t let go! You must see as clearly as I do that we really have no more important mission. For us Denmark represents Culture; that in our hands it will not continue to be Danish but be purely Norwegian will be ensured by who we are – but Denmark is the metropolitan centre of our culture, the day we transfer our allegiance to another it will be all over with us, we will then be exiled to the polar ice. The flexible and gentle in us, that which ties us to the past as well as to what must be done in the future, it is all here in Denmark. Denmark has done wrong by us, as by itself; the former we have lived down, the

¹⁶ For a compact summary of the “language struggle” see footnote 160 (a comment on a letter from Grieg to F. Beyer, 25 November, 1899) in *Edvard Grieg, Letters...* (op.cit.) p. 86.

¹⁷ See note 24 below.

latter we can leave to her own poets, with all their weaknesses. If we let go of Denmark, then is much lost to us, as it is also to them!”¹⁸

Where did Grieg stand in all this? He would certainly have been conscious of the numerous Norwegian dialects as they were faithfully recorded and interpreted in the folksong collections of Andreas Berggreen¹⁹ and Ludvig Lindeman,²⁰ if not otherwise, and during the period 1866-77 he was closely associated with Bjørnson and Ibsen, but he seems not to have been much concerned with the language problem at that time. In 1877-78, and again in 1879, however, he sought refuge in Hardanger, first in Børve, then in Lofthus, in order to find peace in which to compose. He responded warmly to the rural environment (rather more so than did Nina) and he subsequently spoke with sentimental affection of this period in his life, of his friends there and of the local dialect, though he never mastered this himself. Nevertheless, it was perhaps this environment that inspired him to set to music a folk-tale in dialect in *Den Bjergtekne*, Op. 32, and it was no doubt this experience of the life and language of rural Norway that led him to compose the *12 Songs to Poems by A.O. Vinje*, Op. 33, published in 1880. Fifteen years later this was followed by his Op. 67 settings of eight of Arne Garborg’s *Haugtussa* cycle of poems. With these two volumes of songs he erected musical monuments to two of the greatest *landsmål* poets. In his own writing, however, Grieg remained faithful to Dano-Norwegian, which language he mastered stylistically and, as he wrote to Bjørnson, it offended him that “those of us who love it but can’t speak it” should be looked down upon by the advocates of *landsmål* as the national language.²¹ Grieg’s written language is often indistinguishable from Danish and it seems a regrettable consequence of the language controversy that the great literary masterpieces of Norwegian authors such as Bjørnson, Ibsen, Kielland and Hamsun are easier read today in their original form by Danes, it is said, than they are by Norwegians, for whom new editions are “translated” into present-day Norwegian.

The language issue was a bone of contention between Grieg and Bjørnson for many years; when Bjørnson came out publicly against the adoption of *landsmål* in a powerful speech in Kristiania in 1899, Grieg expressed his regret that “he stood where he stood”. In

¹⁸ Bjørnson to Ibsen, 16 December, 1867: “Og hold fast ved Danmark, hold fast! Det maa du se som jeg, at vi saatsige ingen anden Opgave have. Danmark er for os Kulturen, at den gennem os ikke bliver dansk, men enig norsk, derfor borger vor Natur, – men Danmark er vor kulturs Metropolitan, den Dag vi sogne til en anden, er det forbi med os, vi ere da drevne op i Polarisen. De Myge og Milde i os selv, det fortidig Bindende, det Tilkommende i vor Opgave, ligger Altsammen her. Danmark har Uret mod os, som mod sig selv; den Første har vi levet ihjel, den anden overlade vi med alle deres Daarskaber til deres egne Digtere. Slipper vi to Danmark, da er Meget fortabt hos os – men ogsaa Meget her!” *Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson: Gro-tid, Brev fra årene 1857-1870*, ed. Halvdan Koht, (Kristiania and Copenhagen 1912) II, p. 261.

¹⁹ E.g., *Norske Folke-sange og Melodier* (Copenhagen 1842f, 2/1861f).

²⁰ E.g., *Ældre og nyere norske Fjeldmelodier* (Christiania 1853f).

²¹ See note 23 below.

that speech Bjørnson is reported to have said, among other things: “It is said that *landsmål* is more Norwegian [than *rigsmål*]. There was a man who talked about ‘the other writers and then *ours*’. ‘*Ours*’, they were those who wrote *landsmål*; the others were not really Norwegian. The speaker [Bjørnson] asked if the audience thought that he stood there and didn’t speak Norwegian? If so, they were not competent to judge. He could produce witnesses enough from Denmark to testify that there they didn’t consider his language Danish. And he had stood on the same platform as many who spoke *landsmål* and been better understood. Is one not ashamed to suggest that Wergeland is less Norwegian than Aasen? Is only the root important and not the top of the tree, with leaves and flowers? One cannot say that an old root in the woods is more Norwegian than Henrik Ibsen. We are living now in a time when we, by means of our present *rigsmål* and the literature in this language, have given the greatest demonstration of national spirit and won recognition alongside the greatest nations of Europe. And at just this point of time one has chosen to try to get rid of this language!”²²

In a letter to Bjørnson from Copenhagen on 16 January, 1900, Grieg wrote as follows: “How sad it is for me, and many with me, that *you*, with your rhetorical skills, stand where you do! I think that we who live in West Norway are more favorably disposed toward the rural language because it is so much more beautiful and often gives expression to that which is noble in the character of the people. If, like me, you had lived in Hardanger for a year and a half at an important time in your development, you would find it easier to understand me. But I do not doubt for a moment that your lecture has done some good in relation to the ‘language fanatics’ – those narrow-minded people who go so far as to look down on those of us who *only* love the language but cannot speak it!”²³ Nevertheless, in the years that followed he was prepared to concede that, in the light of political developments in the language

²² “Foredrag i Logens store Sal 23. Oktober 1899. Bjørnson aabner sit Felttog mod Maaltvang”, in *Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Artikler og Taler*, ed. Chr. Collijn and H. Eitrem, Vol. II (Kristiania and Copenhagen 1913), p. 414. “Saa siges det, at Maalet er mere norsk. Der var en Mand, som havde snakket om ‘de a’re Digterne og saa vore’. ‘Vore’, det var Maaldigterne; de andre skulde ikke være norske. Taleren [Bjørnson] spurgte, om de Tilstedeværende syntes, han stod her og ikke talte Norsk? I saa Fald var de ikke kompetente til at dømme. Han kunde skaffe Vidnesbyrd nok fra Danmark om, at man der ikke ansaa hans Maal for dansk. Og han havde staaet paa samme Talerplads som mangen, der talte Landsmaal, og var bleven bedre forstaaet. (Bifald.) Skammer man sig ikke ved at kalde Wergeland mindre norsk end Aasen? Har Roden alene Betydning og ikke Træets Top med Løv og Blomster? Man kan ikke sige, at en gammel Rod i Skogen er mere norsk end Henrik Ibsen. Vi staar nu i en Tid, da vi gennem vort nuværende Rigemaal og Literaturen paa dette Maal har givet de største Aandsudslag og vundet Anerkjendelse ved Siden af Europas største Nationer. Og netop denne Tid har man valgt til at ville udrydde dette Sprog! (Stærkt Bifald.)”

²³ Grieg to Bjørnson, 16 January 1900 in *Edvard Grieg, Letters...* (op.cit.), p. 136. “Hvor trist for mig og mange med mig at *Du* med din henførende Evne skal stå der! Jeg tror nu, at vi der vesterpå føler varmere for Målet, fordi det der er såmeget vakkrere og ofte gir Udtryk for det noble i Folkekarakteren. Havde du som jeg, på et vigtigt Punkt i Din Udvikling levet 1½ år i Hardanger, så vilde Du lettere forstå mig. Men derom er jeg intet Øieblik i tvivl: Din Optræden har gjort godt ligeoverfor ‘Målfanatikerne’, dette snæversynte Folk, der går så vidt, at de ser ned på os, der *bare* elsker Målet, men ikke kan tale det!” *Brev i Utvalg* (op.cit.), p. 82.

struggle, Bjørnson's position in this matter was the right one after all. In 1907 he could write: "I have admired and embraced you for your statement on the language issue. I might not have done so formerly, but since the language issue has become a matter of political power, I have turned my back on it. I will continue to love the language as before, but all this insistence on imposing a language by force is unnatural. A language forms and develops itself in accordance with quite other laws than those of force."²⁴ Bjørnson's position was that Dano-Norwegian when spoken by Norwegians was sufficiently distinct from Danish for it to be perfectly satisfactory as a national language – as the following pleasant anecdote illustrates good-humouredly: Not long after the Danish prince Carl had arrived in Norway to assume the throne as King Haakon VII, Grieg and Bjørnson were among those invited to a *souper* held by Prime Minister Michelsen attended also by the new king and queen, as Grieg reported in a letter to Frants Beyer (12 December, 1905): "We sat more or less directly opposite them [the royal couple] and ... when he [the king], after having made a little speech, inadvertently heard Bjørnson whisper – rather too loudly – to Nina (whom he had to table): 'He said *majet*' [Danish pronunciation] instead of *meget*, the king called across the table: 'Yes, Bjørnson, I noticed it myself and I thought of you – but by then it was too late!'"²⁵

Grieg too could poke fun at Danish – as, for instance, on the occasion when, after a not entirely successful performance of *Olav Trygvason* in Copenhagen in October 1889, in which Grieg felt a chorus of Danish singers had not measured up to the standard of the Norwegian chorus of an earlier performance in Kristiania, wounded pride caused him to complain peevishly in a letter to Holter (21 November, 1889): "But it is also a wretched language, this Danish, that with every passing year makes one feel more and more seasick."²⁶ However, this is surely not a dissatisfaction to be taken very seriously. In view of his close association with Denmark over many years, the way Danes spoke his language can hardly have been a problem and, as we have seen, he did eventually come around to Bjørnson's position of accepting that Norwegians and Danes could share a common language.

In both his early diary from 1865-6 and his later diary from 1905-7 Grieg expresses genuine affection for Denmark; on June 3 1907, for example, he wrote: "The poetry of the Danish forest is unique, and the first strong impression from youth remains. As I felt it then,

²⁴ Grieg to Bjørnson, 16 May, 1907: "Kjære Dig, jeg har beundret og omfavnet Dig for Dit Indlæg i Målsagen. Det havde jeg kanskje ikke gjort før i Tiden. Men siden Målsagen er bleven en politisk Magtsag, har jeg tat Afstand fra den. Jeg vil elske Målet som før, men alt dette med Måltvang er Unatur. Et Sprog former og udvikler sig efter helt andre Love end Tvangens." *Brev i Utvalg* (op.cit.), p. 97.

²⁵ "I en Soupe hos Michelsen sad vi omtrent vis-à-vis dem, og en god illustration til Kongens Ligefremhed er det, at da han efter en liden Tale ufrivillig fik høre at Bjørnson lidt vel højt hviskede til Nina (som han havde til Bords): 'Han sa majet!' (istedetfor meget) råbte Kongen over Bordet: 'Ja, Bjørnson, jeg la mærke til det og tænkte på Dem, – men da var det for sent!' " *Edvard Grieg, Brev til Frants Beyer, 1872-1907*, ed. Finn Benestad and Bjarne Kortsen (Oslo 1993), p. 332.

²⁶ "Men det er jo også et forbistret Sprog, dette danske, for hvert År som går mere og mere til at blive Sjøsyg over." *Brev i Utvalg* (op.cit.) I, p.414).

so was it now. Just as overwhelming – yes, perhaps even more so.”²⁷ Elsewhere, in letters and articles, he repeatedly speaks of Danes with respect and friendship and of many aspects of the Danish way of life with appreciation. To his friend, the Danish composer August Winding, he once referred to “my trips to Denmark, which are essential to my existence.”²⁸ Nevertheless, on one occasion (but only one, I think) he lapsed into something resembling the resentful tones of one who feels his country has been oppressed by an occupying power. The occasion was unfortunate as it was a party on a grand scale given in Copenhagen in April 1886 by a musicians’ club called “Fermaten” [The Pause], the intention of which was to demonstrate the great affection and admiration with which the Griegs were regarded in Denmark. The event was recorded by Jacob Fabricius, a prominent and highly respected figure in Danish musical life at the time, who tells that for the occasion a number of Danish composers had collaborated on an ambitious composition for piano and orchestra called “From Norway to Norway” or “Around the World in 80 Melodies”, including quotations from a number of Grieg’s compositions, which culminated, at the return to Norway at journey’s end, with the Norwegian national anthem “Ja, vi elsker dette landet” played by the orchestra accompanied by Grieg’s Piano Concerto. Grieg was apparently not amused and when he later rose to acknowledge a toast in his honour proposed by “old Hartmann”, he did not disguise his irritation. “After a remark concerning the many *fermate* that swarmed over the table ‘like bedbugs’, he referred to the Danish propensity for *fermate*, which provided him with the opportunity to say that he, and many of his countrymen with him, thought back with resentment on the 400-year *fermata* that they, politically, had had to endure under Denmark. – General dismay!”²⁹ His critical – and in the circumstances very rude – intention is clear, but it has always seemed to me that his choice of rhetorical device was inappropriate. The image of the period of union with Denmark as a “four-hundred years’ night” (or *fermata*), a phrase that became a favourite club with which extreme nationalists could belabour Denmark, originated with Ibsen in Act IV of *Peer Gynt*, where it is put into the mouth of a madman from the Malebar Coast, “Mr. Huhu”, a “language fanatic”, who wants his countrymen to return to a primal language spoken by the orang-outangs who inhabited the territory before foreigners came and spoiled the original language. Peer sends him off to Morocco, on the

²⁷ Edvard Grieg, *Diaries...* (op.cit.), p.188. “Den danske Skovpoesi er noget for sig selv. Og det første store Indtryk fra Ungdommen står. Som jeg følte det dengang, sådan var det nu. Lige stort, kanske endda større.” Edvard Grieg, *Dagbøger* (op.cit.), p. 204.

²⁸ Grieg to A. Winding, 31 Jan. 1869: “mine Danmarksreser, som betinger min Tilværelse.” *Brev i Utvalg* (op.cit.) II, p. 243.

²⁹ Lars Børge Fabricius, *Træk af Dansk Musiklivs Historie m.m.* (Copenhagen 1975), pp. 65-6; “Efter en Bemærkning om de mange Fermater, der vrimlede paa Bordet som ‘Væggedyr’, hentydede han til de Danskes Tilbøjelighed for Fermater, og tog deraf Anledning til at sige, at han og mange af hans Landsmænd med Uvillie tænkte tilbage paa den 400 aarige Fermat, som de i politisk Henseende haavde maattet døde under Danmark. – Almindelig Bestyrtelse!” See also pp. 431-4.

pretext that he has heard that there is a colony there that still speaks the language of the orang-outangs. Ibsen hated and feared “language fanatics”, as did Bjørnson and Grieg, and, as Ibsen’s collaborator on the stage version of *Peer Gynt*, Grieg of all people ought to have known that the subject of this satirical scene is not the injustice of the historical union with Denmark, but the internal matter of the language struggle taking place in Norway itself. Bjørnson is clearly aware of this in the review that he wrote within days of *Peer Gynt*’s publication in 1867: “We should just mention that in a lunatic asylum in Cairo, among other crazy people, who are all ‘being themselves’ to the point of madness, he [Peer] also meets a ‘language fanatic’, who answers to the name ‘Huhu’! He is from the Malabar Coast and is in despair because the Malabars, the Portuguese and the Dutch have mixed up the language to such an extent that the original language, the language that the orang-outangs roared in the jungles before the foreigners came and interfered, has been completely crowded out. Mr. Huhu wanders about in profound grief and cannot do otherwise ‘while the people, generation after generation, die uninterpreted’. Because formerly the orang-outang was

‘– the man of the forest and master;
he dared to fight and snarl freely.
As he had been made by the hand of nature,
he grinned and he yawned.
Unhindered he dared to scream,
he was ruler in his land. –
Ah, but then came the yoke of the foreigner
and disturbed the language of the primeval forest.
The four-hundred-year night
descended upon the monkey [fool], –
and one knows that such long nights
bring the people of a country to a standstill.
– The primeval sound of the forest is silenced,
no longer is growling heard!’

This man has thus in order to ‘be himself’ rejected all Culture and he is still himself even when he is ‘no longer himself’ [that is, is out of his mind].”³⁰

³⁰ Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, “Per Gynt” in *Norsk Folkeblad* (Kristiania), 23 November 1867: “Kun skulle vi nævne, at han i en Daarekiste i Kairo træffer blandt andre Gale, som alle indtil Galskab "ere sig selv", ogsaa "en Maalstræver", som lyder Navnet "Huhu"! Han er fra Malabarkysten og er rent fortvivlet over, at Malebarer, Portugisere og Hollændere have blandet Sproget derhenne, saa det oprindelige Sprog, det, som Orangutangen brølte i Skogene, før hine kom og blandede, det er aldeles fortrængt. Hr. Huhu gaar om i dyb Græmmelse, og kan ikke andet, "naar Folket, Slægt paa Slægt dør ufortolket". Thi før var Orangutangen
‘– Skogens mand og Herre;
frit han turde slaa og snærre.
Som Naturens Haand ham skabte,
saa han gren og saa han gabte.
Uforment han turde skrige,
han var Hersker i sit Rige. –
Ak, men saa kom Fremmedaaget
og forplumred Urskogs-Sproget.

Happily, this uncharacteristic display of temper had no lasting consequences for the good relations that always existed between Grieg and Denmark and in 1903, when Danish friends and admirers had sent a handsome gift to Trolldhaugen on the occasion of Grieg's 60th birthday, he could write in his eloquent letter of thanks: "... in Denmark I have no enemies."³¹

So if we should ask again the question with which we began [some 45 minutes ago]: "What was Grieg doing in Denmark for a fourth part of his life?" it is perhaps sufficient to say that he was – as was only right and proper – enjoying the company of friends in his "second home", where he was loved and where his art was richly appreciated and where he thrived in an environment which, as he himself said, had always been "essential to his existence". For, as Ole Feldbæk observed at the close of his address to another Grieg-symposium held in Copenhagen to celebrate the 150th anniversary of his birth in 1993, "Here he had never been a stranger – and, as a Norwegian, never could be, either."³²

Firehundraaig Natten
 ruged over Abekatten, -
 og man ved, saa lange Nætter
 Landsens Folk i Stampe sætter.
 - Skogens Urlyd er forstummet,
 ikke længer blir der brummet!

Denne Mand har altsaa for at "være sig selv" trodset al Kultur, og er sig selv endog nu, naar han er "fra sig selv!"
³¹ See *Edvard Grieg, Diaries...* (op.cit.), p. 365; in Norwegian in *Edvard Grieg, Artikler og taler*, ed. Ø. Gaukstad (op.cit), p. 204.

³² "Her havde han aldrig været en fremmed. Og kunne som norsk heller ikke være det." (see note. 3).