Did Grundtvig really belong in Copenhagen during the Golden Age? In a literal sense, of course yes. He lived in the capital throughout his professionally active life, spending a total of 65 years at 24 different addresses. But in a figurative sense, virtually no. He differs in important respects from the other great personalities of the age.

Søren Kierkegaard was able to play upon the city's possibilities like a virtuoso on his instrument, transforming streets, squares, cafés, the theatre and the churches into catalysts for the tireless process of self-analysis and self-projection that formed the basis of his authorship. Hans Christian Andersen did the same, though to a less deliberate extent. But this was not how Grundtvig used Copenhagen. When Grundtvig walked in the streets of the capital it was not just to be seen but because he had to go somewhere, for example to a meeting in the Rigsdag (Parliament), or to call on friends. Sometimes – though perhaps not so very often – he sought solitude, inspiration or a little fresh air by walking in Rosenborg Park (fig. 56) or on the city ramparts at Vesterport. He made one

---

Fig. 56. Henrik Gottfried Bønfeldt (1767-1829): The Gardens of Rosenborg Palace, 1810. Tempera. 240 x 332 mm. Københavns Bymuseum, Copenhagen. Inv. no. 1932. 143.

Rosenborg Gardens were opened to the public in 1771, offering the pleasant possibility of taking a country walk within the ramparts of the confined and overcrowded capital. Here, nurses tending small children had a chance of meeting soldiers from the barracks of the Royal Guards close to Rosenborg Palace, and even outside the summer season people such as Grundtvig and later the young Georg Brandes could find a place of solitude for quiet reflection.
brief and heartless reference to the amusement park in Tivoli Gardens (which had opened in 1843) dismissing it as "a fleeting whim of fashion"—one of his prophecies that was wide of the mark! However, he certainly went there four times between 1856 and 1860—not to ride on the switchback, but to make speeches to students and about the Constitution.

At this time the loyal citizens of Copenhagen had four fixed points on which to take their bearings: the University, Frue Kirke (the Church of Our Lady), both in Frue Plads (Our Lady's Square), the Royal Theatre in Kongens Nytorv (the King's New Square) and lastly the King and the Court, who had taken up residence in the Amalienborg mansions after the destruction of Christiansborg Palace by fire in 1794. Grundtvig did not have a cordial relationship with any of these points on the map of Copenhagen, nor did he wish to.

The University had pronounced him unqualified for a professorship in history and mythology, not just once but twice (in 1816 and again in 1871) after which he gave up applying. As a chaplain at Vartov Hospital (an institution for the old and infirm) from 1839 onwards it was his duty to supervise university examinations in theology, but as a rule he failed to turn up, omitted to send an excuse and in this way wrecked havoc in the examination system, with the result that after a complaint case in 1845 he was officially relieved of his duties. He did, however, act as an examiner of probationary sermons right up to 1855. 5

This was unfortunate. Grundtvig admittedly acknowledged an actor's first performance of a role with an "All right, I'll let that pass", but insisted that the second and subsequent performances amounted to pure affection. Madame Heiberg declared that the same applied to a clergyman who preached the same sermon in two different churches. Grundtvig replied that that was a very different matter, because the preacher used his own words. Madame Heiberg concluded that Grundtvig did not want to understand that a good actor identifies himself with the dramatist. 6

The dissonance which existed between Grundtvig and the theatre and acting emerged very clearly in his treatment of the subject in his writings on the history of the world, although curiously enough, in May 1841, he was seriously tempted to go to the Royal Theatre to see Sille Beyer's saga drama Ingolf and Valgard. At this time Grundtvig was absorbed in his campaign to establish a Danish Folk High School and had drawn attention in several pamphlets to Iceland during the Middle Ages, when stories were told in the mother tongue about anything and everything in the form of sagas. He believed it was a unique example in European history of an entire country more or less functioning as a university in the national language. This is why he was most interested in seeing the scenery: the interior of an Icelandic house. But nothing came of it. 7

Nevertheless, the fact that the notion occurred to him at all may also demonstrate that the Royal Theatre, with its costumes, scenery and backcloths, provided audiences with historical and geographical enlightenment at a time when the practice of opening museums to the public had only recently been initiated and few people were in a position to go travelling abroad.

Grundtvig's relations with the monarchs of his time were good: professional with Frederik VI, but more cordial with Christian VIII, whose queen, Caroline Amalie, must be reckoned among the first real Grundtvigians. Already as crown princess she had summoned Grundtvig in 1839 to give private lectures on history at Amalienborg Palace for the benefit of herself and her ladies-in-waiting, a regular practice until Grundtvig's fit of madness in March 1844, after which it was discontinued. He never cultivated the court and its circles as an institution. He did participate, however, in the Reformations festivities in Copenhagen in 1836. Afterwards he wrote to Ingeborg:

For the first time, and probably also for the last, I sat recently with so many, indeed with all the others, chewing and drinking heavily in the King's antechamber, where I doubtless found it less tiring than normally, especially as one received money for it into the bargain [a commemorative medal], yet I had to leave the table hungry while observing my neighbours smoking their lips,
include the most famous personages of the period amongst the spectators, and Grundtvig agreed to sit for Gertner post festum in the artist's studio in Christiansborg Palace. Grundtvig was not actually in Hillerød on the day of the anointment: he was preaching at Vartov and in the evening arranged a friendly get-together in the Danske Samfund outside the normal season for the society's meetings. In both cases he brought along a leaflet with some of his recent poems: on the first occasion two hymns and on the second three toasting songs (to the king, the queen and Ojger the Dane).22

Compared with other intellectual personages of the day, Grundtvig was a stay-at-home. The grand tours through Germany, France, Austria and Italy financed by the royal purse for so many applicants had no appeal to him. On the basis of his knowledge of the history of the world and of the Church he was sceptical towards Germany, which he regarded as persistently troubled and fermenting, and he preferred to disassociate himself from the Catholic south of Europe, which he regarded as degenerate. Characteristically, his four visits to England — in the summers of 1829, 1830, 1831 and 1843 — were made specifically for the purposes of research and in order to visit libraries. Grundtvig's only holiday (a concept unknown in the labour market of the times!) was a fortnight spent in Norway in the summer of 1851 — a veritable triumphal skaldic progress. He returned a life-long coolness towards Sweden; despite earnest requests in his later years he never even crossed the Sound, nor did he ever visit the first Folk High School, founded at Rødding in North Slesvig, though he had of course frequently been invited to do so. Grundtvig's travels took place in his smoke-filled study through his reading, and he paid more attention to phases in time than stations in space. He adopted what he called — in another context — "a hawk's-eye view" of the world around him.

As an elderly man, Grundtvig himself became to an increasing extent one of the sights of Copenhagen. He won wide acclamation for the first time from two successive younger generations with his Mandel-Minde (Living Memory) lectures on the previous 90 years of European history, given at Borch College in Store Kannikstraße (Great Canon Street) in the autumn of 1838. As far as popularity was concerned, this was the turning-point in his life. He became a central figure in the city scene. When Thorvaldsen returned to Denmark on 7 September 1838 Grundtvig sat (as can be seen on the frieze by Jørgen Sonne that decorates the outside of the walls of the Thorvaldsen Museum) in a boat together with other writers: Oehlenschläger, Heiberg, Hertz, Winther and Hans Christian Andersen (fig. 58). The succession in December 1839 also brought about a change in public attitudes and values, and Grundtvig was to benefit in unpredictable ways as a newly established popular orator and politician (a matter that deserved closer examination). Whereas formerly he had been regarded as a frightening — albeit fascinating — eccentric, he was now recognized for his qualities. At the queen's request he thus acted as interpreter when Elisabeth Fry, the British prison reformer and Quaker, visited Copenhagen's prisons in August 1841. In September that same year the queen also appointed him as director (for life) of her new orphanage in Nørre Slagelse (today the address of the present Folke-teater), which was moreover, as from 1842, exempted by special decree from supervision by the Copenhagen School Board. In addition to his popular activities in the Danske Samfund he received and accepted invitations to speak in connection with discussions on Scandinavian, national-liberal and national affairs. At a celebration at Skydsebanen (the Shooting Range, a Copenhagen clubhouse) on 14 November 1846, Oehlenschläger's 70th birthday, Grundtvig presented a song and made three speeches, and it was also he who, when requested to do so by the arrangers, crowned the old poet with a laurel wreath on behalf of the women of Denmark. Even those who felt offended by Grundtvig's manners and opinions were overwhelmed by his charisma. This is evidenced by a profile of him in the satirical magazine Corsaren (The Corsair) on 9 September 1853 (fig. 59). Its author, Claudius Rosenhoff, admittedly suggests at first that Grundtvig should be locked up in Bistrup (a lunatic asylum near Roskilde) but concluded by regretting his evaluation:

... when I saw him tiptoe forward on a festive occasion, crowned Oehlenschläger with a laurel wreath, kiss him and proceed to declare his maxims, then it seemed to me that we were more or less clever pygmies compared with this half-crazy giant.

The 50th anniversary of Grundtvig's ordination was celebrated in 1861 by a special service at Vartov, and later that day D. G. Monrad, minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs and Public Instruction, gave him a rank on a level with the Bishop of Zealand (and, contrary to the wording of the royal commission, also the title of bishop). During the last nine years of Grundtvig's life his supporters arranged so-called Friends' Meetings, which were held during the days around his birthday, 8 September. His Vartov congregation and its loud, staccato hymn-singing at a particularly fast tempo (known as "Vartov gallopades"), was also brought to the attention of tourists. The young English poet Edmund Gosse has related that in the summer of 1872, a few months before Grundtvig's death, he was recommended to attend a service at Vartov. He received an unforgettable, though no

Fig. 58. Jørgen Sonne (1801-1890): Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig in the Poets' Boat, 1847 (reconstructed in the 1970s). Part of the frieze round Thorvaldsen Museum, Copenhagen.

Grundtvig spent most of his life in his study, reading, thinking, writing and smoking his pipe, all of which is said to have given him a permanently pale complexion. He seldom ventured far afield, but on Thorvaldsen's return to Copenhagen, he joined the poets in a boat to greet the famous sculptor along with the rest of the citizens of Copenhagen.

partly with oysters, in which I was not interested, and partly with other rarities which no-one offered me and I could not be bothered to exert myself to reach.

The tone of the letter is revealing: court life held no interest for him whatsoever, and the same applied to the good things of life, such as luxury foods. On the occasion of Christian VIII's silver wedding on 22 May 1840 Grundtvig was a stay-at-home. The grand tours through Germany, France, Austria and Italy financed by the royal purse for so many applicants had no appeal to him. On the basis of his knowledge of the history of the world and of the Church he was sceptical towards Germany, which he regarded as persistently troubled and fermenting, and he preferred to disassociate himself from the Catholic south of Europe, which he regarded as degenerate. Characteristically, his four visits to England — in the summers of 1829, 1830, 1831 and 1843 — were made specifically for the purposes of research and in order to visit libraries. Grundtvig's only holiday (a concept unknown in the labour market of the times!) was a fortnight spent in Norway in the summer of 1851 — a veritable triumphal skaldic progress. He returned a life-long coolness towards Sweden; despite earnest requests in his later years he never even crossed the Sound, nor did he ever visit the first Folk High School, founded at Rødding in North Slesvig, though he had of course frequently been invited to do so. Grundtvig's travels took place in his smoke-filled study through his reading, and he paid more attention to phases in time than stations in space. He adopted what he called — in another context — "a hawk's-eye view" of the world around him.

As an elderly man, Grundtvig himself became to an increasing extent one of the sights of Copenhagen. He won wide acclamation for the first time from two successive younger generations with his Mandel-Minde (Living Memory) lectures on the previous 90 years of European history, given at Borch College in Store Kannikstraße (Great Canon Street) in the autumn of 1838. As far as popularity was concerned, this was the turning-point in his life. He became a central figure in the city scene. When Thorvaldsen returned to Denmark on 7 September 1838 Grundtvig sat (as can be seen on the frieze by Jørgen Sonne that decorates the outside of the walls of the Thorvaldsen Museum) in a boat together with other writers: Oehlenschläger, Heiberg, Hertz, Winther and Hans Christian Andersen (fig. 58). The succession in December 1839 also brought about a change in public attitudes and values, and Grundtvig was to benefit in unpredictable ways as a newly established popular orator and politician (a matter that deserved closer examination). Whereas formerly he had been regarded as a frightening — albeit fascinating — eccentric, he was now recognized for his qualities. At the queen's request he thus acted as interpreter when Elisabeth Fry, the British prison reformer and Quaker, visited Copenhagen's prisons in August 1841. In September that same year the queen also appointed him as director (for life) of her new orphanage in Nørre Slagelse (today the address of the present Folke-teater), which was moreover, as from 1842, exempted by special decree from supervision by the Copenhagen School Board. In addition to his popular activities in the Danske Samfund he received and accepted invitations to speak in connection with discussions on Scandinavian, national-liberal and national affairs. At a celebration at Skydsebanen (the Shooting Range, a Copenhagen clubhouse) on 14 November 1846, Oehlenschläger's 70th birthday, Grundtvig presented a song and made three speeches, and it was also he who, when requested to do so by the arrangers, crowned the old poet with a laurel wreath on behalf of the women of Denmark. Even those who felt offended by Grundtvig's manners and opinions were overwhelmed by his charisma. This is evidenced by a profile of him in the satirical magazine Corsaren (The Corsair) on 9 September 1853 (fig. 59). Its author, Claudius Rosenhoff, admittedly suggests at first that Grundtvig should be locked up in Bistrup (a lunatic asylum near Roskilde) but concluded by regretting his evaluation:

... when I saw him tiptoe forward on a festive occasion, crowned Oehlenschläger with a laurel wreath, kiss him and proceed to declare his maxims, then it seemed to me that we were more or less clever pygmies compared with this half-crazy giant.

The 50th anniversary of Grundtvig's ordination was celebrated in 1861 by a special service at Vartov, and later that day D. G. Monrad, minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs and Public Instruction, gave him a rank on a level with the Bishop of Zealand (and, contrary to the wording of the royal commission, also the title of bishop). During the last nine years of Grundtvig's life his supporters arranged so-called Friends' Meetings, which were held during the days around his birthday, 8 September. His Vartov congregation and its loud, staccato hymn-singing at a particularly fast tempo (known as "Vartov gallopades"), was also brought to the attention of tourists. The young English poet Edmund Gosse has related that in the summer of 1872, a few months before Grundtvig's death, he was recommended to attend a service at Vartov. He received an unforgettable, though no

Fig. 59. Claudius Rosenhoff (1804-1869): Profile of Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig. From the satirical magazine Corsaren, 71 x 42 mm. The Royal Library, Copenhagen. Grundtvig was a poet, philologist, historian and educationist as well as clergyman, but in the popular imagination he was primarily thought of as a person attired in a Danish Protestant cleric's ruff and gown. He is immediately recognizable even in this silhouette from Corsaren on the occasion of his 70th birthday in 1853.
doubt somewhat exaggerated impression of Grundtvig as an ancient heathen sacrificial priest with a sonorous, ghostly voice (fig. 60).  

2. GRUNDTVIG AND THE GOLDEN AGE

Grundtvig's relationship with most of what is celebrated nowadays as Copenhagen's Golden Age was not particularly cordial. In 1838 he said bluntly, "My writings as well as my speeches prove that few can be more critical than I of present conditions in Denmark and elsewhere."  

In general, the artistic manifestations of the Golden Age left him cold. His lack of interest in the theatre has already been mentioned. He was devoid of musicality and never attended concerts, one of the period's favourite forms of public performance. But of course people sang in his churches. It was moreover in his auditorium at Borch College on 17 October 1838 that a crowd of supporters burst out singing his national ballad about the naval hero Peter Willemoes, "Kommer hid, I Figer smaae" (Come hither, you little girls) in unison. Thus was founded the specifically Danish tradition of singing a song before and after a public lecture. But even though the finest composers of the Golden Age, such as Weyse, Berggreen, Hartmann, Rung and Niels W. Gade, set Grundtvig's words to music, no evidence has come to light of any contact between them and him.

Sculpture and painting were regarded by Grundtvig as the lowest and most materialistic art forms on a scale headed by "the art of the word", or poetry. Behind this evaluation lay undeniably the Old Testament's commandment against making images of God. In his poem "Kierminde-Bladet" (The Forget-me-not Leaf) written as a farewell greeting to the poet B. S. Ingemann in April 1818 on his departure for the West, he acknowledged deviation from the religious standpoint that the Greeks, through the Olympic Games, and the orator Demosthenes. In his view, the circumstances of the history of ancient Greece when the written and spoken word and spirituality dominated, as in Homer, the historian Herodotus, the tragedian Aeschylus, the philosopher Plato and with Demosthenes. In his view, the circumstance that the Greeks, through the Olympic Games, gradually attributed greater importance to the human body and physical activities than to artistic disciplines was already a sign of decline, and matters deteriorated even more seriously when the Classical art of sculpture started producing petrified versions of these athletes. This evaluation on Grundtvig's part was to affect the later Folk High Schools' attitude to the matter.

He expressed his views on painting even more sparingly - on Danish national painting probably not at all. Even though Grundtvig, through his personality, attracted the best of the Golden Age's young painters and draughtsmen - P. C. Skovgaard, Christian Kabke and J. Th. Lundbye - he was probably never interested in their landscapes, though he did recollect and muse upon the scenic beauty of his native soil of South Zealand. On his 70th birthday in 1853 (fig. 61), he was probably pleased to be presented with this postcard like painting of the church and parsonage in Udby, where he spent his childhood.

At the inauguration of Thorvaldsen's studio at Nyvold in 1839 Grundtvig had already stated bluntly in print in the magazine Brage og Idun (Brage and Idun) that he had never admired any of the master's works, for he regarded God as the only competent sculptor.

In his Haandbog i Verdens-Historien (Handbook of World History), I, 1833, Grundtvig expressed his preference for that part of the history of ancient Greece when the written and spoken word and spirituality dominated, as in Homer, the historian Herodotus, the tragedian Aeschylus, the philosopher Plato and the orator Demosthenes. In his view, the circumstance that the Greeks, through the Olympic Games, gradually attributed greater importance to the human body and physical activities than to artistic disciplines was already a sign of decline, and matters deteriorated even more seriously when the Classical art of sculpture started producing petrified versions of these athletes. This evaluation on Grundtvig's part was to affect the later Folk High Schools' attitude to the matter.

He expressed his views on painting even more sparingly - on Danish national painting probably not at all. Even though Grundtvig, through his personality, attracted the best of the Golden Age's young painters and draughtsmen - P. C. Skovgaard, Christian Kabke and J. Th. Lundbye - he was probably never interested in their landscapes, though he did recollect and muse upon the scenic beauty of his native soil of South Zealand. On his 70th birthday in 1853 (fig. 61), he was probably pleased to be presented with this postcard-like painting of the church and parsonage in Udby, where he spent his childhood.
FIG. 62. Constantine Hansen, Frederiksborgmuseet, Hillerød, inv. no. A 5839. The writer, whose works he diligently studied, Constantin Hansen rather deplorably supported the struggle.

80 FLEMMING LUNDGREEN-NIELSEN

Hansen (1804-1880): an anetv стule. This is artlst's second attempt to characterize the great writer, whose works he diligently studied. While other painters tried to capture the gentle human qualities of his favourite figure, Constantin Hansen rather depicted the man who had become a legend in his own lifetime because of his intellectual struggle.

Grundtvig's warmest appreciation was of course reserved for the writers of the period. His beloved king, Frederik VI, although lacking the ability to understand the fine arts, nevertheless supported the principle - of their art. He took great pains to benefit and please the fatherland. His beloved portraits of the Battle of Copenhagen in 1801 - was a fixed starting-point throughout Grundtvig's life for his hopes for the development of the nineteenth century. However, the moment he saw the individual works of the epoch-making New Year's Day (fig. 62) - an event which was a harsh way of putting things, especially coming from Grundtvig. Even Grundtvig's loyal friend Ingemann, who was a senior master at the academy (a branch university) in the small but venerable historic town of Soro, had to make do with temperate praise - Grundtvig did not care for Ingemann's famous historical novels, which were best-sellers in their day, because he found the novels, as a literary genre, worthless. He regarded Ingemann's hymns as blessed little cherubs, not grown-up singing, and passed over his morning songs for children in a letter with a brief note of acknowledgement.

Most frequently mentioned by Grundtvig in the form of references to titles, but nobody reads any more: the epic poem De sorte Ridder (The Black Knights), 1814, and the closet drama Underbarnet (Reinald the Miracle Child), 1816. He took genuine pleasure in Ingemann's cycle of poems Holger Danske (Ogier the Dane), 1837, because it gave an adequate impression of the passage of the Danish national character through heathen as well as Christian times. The others, whom we now regard as the great writers of the Danish Golden Age, such as Steen Steensen Blicher, Heiberg, Hertz, Hans Christian Andersen, M. Goldschmidt, Kierkegaard and Frederik Paludan-Müller, are touched on by Grundtvig in the form of references to titles, but without revealing any real standpoint or assessment.

It was thus not Grundtvig's opinion that the first half of the nineteenth century represented a cultural Golden Age at all. On the contrary, he complained time and again, from the bombardment of Copenhagen in 1807 onwards, about the apathy and somnolence of the period, its cultivation of the material and the comfortable, its inane masquerades and illuminations, its oyster and turtle parties, in short, its serving of "tasty pork sausages" as he bluntly expressed it. At the beginning of the 1820s he wrote to Steffens about his own times, asserting that they represented a deathly quiet graveyard where some people collect worms, others dig vainly for treasures and yet others put all sorts of things together to form monstrous skeletons. At the time, the period itself was referred to as a 'golden age' only on a few occasions - the term was not to be widely used until after the 1890s. In 1894 the leading Danish critic of modern literature, Georg Brandes, was still grumbling in a literary review:

2. GRUNDTVIG'S VIEW OF THE GOLDEN AGE

In Grundtvig's view, the epoch-making New Year's Day heralding the nineteenth century consisted of the contributions made by Steffens, Oehlenschläger and Thorvaldsen.
Steffens (see fig. 1, p. 9), in his seventh introductory lecture, described the great past when the gods walked on earth and when words and actions were one and the same thing. He concluded his historical survey in his eighth lecture by prophesying a second coming of the more splendid age with reference to German Romanticism and Goethe. The romantic poem with which Oehlenschläger made his debut, “Guldhornerne” (The Golden Horns), 1802, made reference in the same style to precisely the time “when Heaven was on Earth”, the point being that the two golden horns were doomed to be lost, because the present day only saw their value as metal, not their poetic and intellectual message about the divine. The golden horns may have vanished, but on the other hand Oehlenschläger’s poem about them became, in a figurative sense, a third golden horn,23 an inspiration for poetry and intellectual life for the rest of the century, at all events up to and including Vilhelm Andersen’s doctoral dissertation on the subject in 1896. At the same time Thorvaldsen’s statue of “Jason with the Golden Fleece” in Rome represented a rebirth of Greek antiquity (fig. 63).

This new generation therefore not only had a past golden age to yearn for. Included in its outlook was the prospect of a new golden age that possibly lay ahead. The model was moreover Christian: from Paradise through the Fall of Man to the new Jerusalem. In spite of everything it kindled optimism and the energy for new achievements.

Older humanists, like Professor Knud Lyne Rahbek in his rural home outside Copenhagen near Frederiksborg Palace, had a different outlook. Rahbek always felt that Denmark’s Golden Age lay irreversibly behind in the eighteenth century, in the Holberg era up to about 1750, in Ewald’s and Wessel’s jubilee of the Norske Selskab (the Norwegian Society) in 1792, Rahbek spoke specifically about the splendid days of yore, conscious of the fact that the jubilee was more of a loving farewell to the past than a joyful welcome to what lay ahead. For the mature Rahbek, Denmark’s truly Golden Age was the period 1784–99. When public opinion coincided with public spirit – when the whole population was concerned with renewal and reform,24 this idea of a golden age as held by Rahbek is described very differently by Grundtvig in his Verdenskroniken (World Chronicle), 1812: Suhm’s best historical work, Historien af Danmark, Norge og Holsten ad tvende Uldog (The History of Denmark, Norway and Holstein in Two Extracts). 1776, was changed in later editions (1781 and 1802) in order to “make young people believe that our age is the golden instead of the poisonous”, and the general outlook was thoroughly materialistic:

...great wealth had flowed into individual homes, sumptuousness and voluptuousness grew on the gold-midden, selfishness thrived. People completely forgot that it is God who gives them their daily bread and thought only of reaping and enjoyment.

The tightening up of the Printing Act in 1799 had unfortunately silenced the "intellectual stock exchange", but it also prevented "ungodliness, defamation of character and rebellious talk. Everything seemed about to fall into a sleep of intoxication or stupor" – until God’s voice of thunder broke through the guns in 1801 and aroused the nation.25

Rahbek’s academic respect for the culture of the Classical Roman Empire was certainly not shared by Grundtvig either. Writers in those days, he wrote in Verdenskroniken, 1812, were often “despisers of God, immersed themselves in life on earth and abused their art to gild vice, or to win the favour of the powerful by flattery”. In Grundtvig’s view, the empire of Augustus stood as a large, dead tree, its branches withered, with the result that his rule was only “Rome’s golden era, just as the glow of the evening sun sometimes seems to us to gild with a more delicious lustre than the blush of dawn” – but it was followed by night, not by day, and its flowers produced seeds that could not germinate. Grundtvig warned against the attempts made by the eighteenth century’s schoolmasters (it could be Rousseau and Pestalozzi) as well as Napoleon’s empire, each in their own way, to revise these so-called golden days. In his Haandbog i Verdens-Historien, I, 1833, he declared that we must on no account confuse “the golden age and golden mean of ‘tyranny’ with that of the human spirit”26

Grundtvig found a more positive notion of the golden age in Nordic heathendom and also in Christianity in which each nation and people would arise in a clarified, that is to say purified, reinforced and transilluminated form in order to become part of ordinary human life. The order was first a member of a nation, then a human being, and thereafter a Christian.27
3. Grundtvig's Golden Year

In his younger days, Grundtvig's most frequent starting-point was that the everlasting and the finite were diametrical opposites. From around 1815 he began to treat it was that the everlasting and the finite were the rest of his life he used the phrases 'golden age' and 'golden year', quite consistently: 'golden age' designated the vanished part and 'golden year' the near future or even the present. The actual term 'golden year' is derived from the Jewish year of jubilee, which occurred every fifty years (Leviticus 25). The term appeared in Danish as a reproduction of Joshua 6:4 in the oldest Danish translation of the Bible, from the second half of the fifteenth century: a forladselse af gyllins ast (year of forgiveness or joy or gold). It had just been published in 1828 after a manuscript. In the second, expanded edition of Kroneske-Rium til Levende Skoledrag (Chronicle Rhymes for Practical Use in Schools), 1842, Grundtvig drew attention to this Dano-lexical meaning in a newly appended note to his poem “Jerusalem”, the last in the book: “The Golden Year is the Danish expression for Jubilee Year”.

The biblical concept of a golden year occurring in the middle and at the end of a century is explained by Grundtvig in his Haandbog i Verdens-Historien, I. 1833, with references to the Pentateuch and the ancient Jewish historian Josephus, as being the result of a kind of social distribution policy: all domestic debt was remitted, and inherited land that had passed out of a family was restored to it. Grundtvig believed that the main purpose of the 'golden year' institution from the point of view of the citizen was to safeguard private property and prevent the damage of the big landowners. Combined with the law about a year of rest every seventh year, where all Hebrew thralls were set free, it ensured that the Jews would live in “a country where no doubt, everywhere, only few became very rich and even fewer were very poor”. The weighty volume concludes with Christ proclaiming (according to Luke 4:19, a quotation from Isaiah 61:2) “the new era as a golden year for the whole of mankind”.

The term ‘golden year’ was undoubtedly used many times in Grundtvig's sermons and theological writings, but a comprehensive investigation has not been made. The Sang-Verk has 40 instances of the use of the term in its hymns. It is used in “Vidunderligst af Alt pa Jord” (Most wonderful of all on earth) about life after death, “Evighedens Gyldeen-Aar” (Eternity’s Golden Year), but can also designate the pleasure derived by earthly life from faith in, and hope for, eternal life or the Church’s vocation and work on earth under rather problematic conditions.

Grundtvig also used the term in a worldly context to designate a phase in history. The background for understanding it in this sense is his feeling of being a symbol himself, a prophecy of a renewal of Danish spiritual, ecclesiastical and social life. It was launched in the prologue and epilogue of his poem “Paaakte-Lilien” (The Daffodil) of 1817 and repeated with greater force and breadth in his prophetic lay Ny-aars-Morgen (New Year’s Morning), 1842. With hindsight we can easily recognize the trait, but his contemporaries barely understood his words and could not accept even what they did understand. As a new approach, he rejected the strategic error of his youth:

the fundamental delusion which I shared with all historical scholars of the post-medieval period, namely that by immersing oneself in antiquity one would be able to – and should – bring about a rebirth of its splendour. What I tried to do was termed folly, because I endeavoured to invoke, not the so-called ‘Classical Era’ and especially the ‘Golden Age’ of Augustus, but the heathen times and Middle Ages of the North.

Instead – especially after his visits to England – Grundtvig explored his own society in order to examine its organization and influence its development. In Goethe’s novel Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (Wilhelm Meister’s Apprentice Years), which Grundtvig read in May-June 1803 in Rahbek’s translation of 1801-02, Lothario, who has returned from an abortive attempt to become an American, declares: “Hier, oder nirgend ist Amerika!” (Here, or nowhere, is America!). In the same style, Grundtvig now began to say, time and again: “Here, or nowhere, the Golden Year will come.”

Under Frederik VI the king’s person became a symbol of a golden age to a degree unparalleled under any earlier or later absolute monarch in Denmark. This was due to a combination of his personality, his long reign (55 years) and the tremendous expansion of printed literature, particularly newspapers and periodicals. His life gradually took on the character of a modern myth, at all events in public ceremonies and apparently also in the minds of the people as a whole.

This is exemplified by his triumphal return on 1 June 1855 from the Congress of Vienna, when it was widely felt that he had saved the nation’s independence. After finally having let himself be anointed as king on 31 July that same year (rather conveniently, from the point of view of the royal household, on his silver wedding day), Frederik VI declined expensive festivities in his own honour for the rest of his life. Despite his lofty view of the hereditary monarchy he was sufficiently straightforward and down to earth not to believe in flattery, preferring to spend money on helping the poor and other deserving causes. The public feeling that his reign was a golden age therefore found few possibilities of being displayed in areas outside the obligatory occasional poems and the Royal Theatre, whose rear stalls represented a usable – and much used – safety valve for public opinion prior to the June Constitution’s abolition of censorship of printed matter. By his own account the king actually experienced the best evening of his life at the theatre on 7 October 1850, when the audience demonstratively applauded him after the performance of Den Stumme i Portici (The Mute Girl of Portici, or Masaniello), the opera by D. F. Auber that had provoked a rebellion in Brussels on 25 August that same year and subsequently the formation of the state of Belgium. Copenhagen’s civil servants and parvenus by appointment to the royal court were obviously anxious to uphold the Danish absolute monarchy, but the existence during this period of a genuine affection for the king and his family should not be disregarded.

A final major manifestation of this affection...
occurred in 1833 and inspired Grundtvig to a ‘golden year’ poem six months later. In July the king had been very seriously ill at Louisenlund Palace on the Schlei Fjord, but had returned in August, apparently fully recovered, to Copenhagen. Details of the mood that prevailed have been preserved in a few commentaries. The king had left Louisenlund at 7 o'clock in the morning of Friday, 2 August, and been accompanied to Schleimunde by the Duke and Duchess of Glücksborg and their children. The weather was “beautiful and agreeable for steamship travel”, but the small, not particularly comfortable royal yacht København nevertheless anchored up for the night off Ullshale (the northern tip of the island of Møn). On Saturday morning the voyage continued towards Copenhagen, encountering stormy weather and heavy seas in the Bay of Koge. The arrival of the royal yacht was finally espied, advancing:Set aside their work and business and excitedly “kept joy and the swinging of hats”, or, as one eye-witness: the people, impelled by “the most sincere, completely voluntary, child-like and yet so conscious feeling of loving affection, loyalty and gratitude” held “a great divine service in the Temple of the Lord on the coast of the Sound!!” Grundtvig, who was no doubt also present, gave an account of the interplay between monarch and people in stanza 37 of a poem from 1834 as follows:

Then gentlemen could be seen embracing and shaking hands with those nearest to them, sailors in their boots, working men and simple citizens. It was a scene that should have been immortalized by the greatest painters had these, at the sight, been able to do anything but weep:

As the sloop now approached, the emotions of many dissolved into joyful shouts of happiness; but thousands of the beast lips fell silent, tears were violently restrained, until the little blue cap, swung by his own hand, appeared outside the sloop’s tent curtains.

When the royal couple had assumed their places in the royal carriage the king permitted the horses to be taken out of the shafts so that people might pull it to Amalienborg Palace “amidst cheers and shouts of joy and the swinging of hats”, or, as Adresnavisien (the Advertisement Paper) expressed it more poetically in a front page column before the advertisement: “he was borne safely to the Royal Castle on the hands of the [capital’s] inhabitants”. The king had to step forward on the balcony in order to acknowledge the ovations. In the evening it pleased him and his family to drive through the main streets “far from the Kulisse of a little man”, and that the people, “the big national family”, and that the people, “the king and his family to drive through the main streets of the city to see his subjects’ illuminations. The festivities continued during the following days, including student processions and military parades. Under the pseudonym “A Voice from the People”, one writer asserted that “Det var en deilig Scene, / Men inertia Skue-Spi” (It was a lovely scene. / But not an acted play) (stanzas 37).

Later in the poem, using a typographically emphasized play on words, Grundtvig asserted that “Det var en dolig Scene, / Men intet Skue-Spi” (It was a lovely scene. / But not an acted play) (stanzas 37).

On the very day of the royal arrival the event prompted in the press a public subscription for a commemorative medal which, despite a number of accidents in the course of production, it was possible to present to the royal couple on the anniversary of their return (fig. 65). The obverse showed the king in profile, the reverse the city of Copenhagen in the shape of a woman with a brick crown making offerings to a statue of Hygiea, the goddess of health, placed on a high pedestal in front of a burning altar with an Asclepius staff (Hygiea was the daughter of the Greek god of medicine, Asclepius). Not only Grundtvig himself but also his three children were among the almost 1,700 Copenhagen contributors to the project; but perhaps he was disappointed at the use of Greek instead of Nordic mythology.

This was certainly not the case with Grundtvig’s own monument to the king, a poem of 71 solid stanzas printed in Den nordiske Kirketidende (The Nordic Church Times) on 26 January 1834 under the title “Golden-Aar” (The Golden Year). Its purpose, recalling the commemorative medal, was to mark not only the king’s 50th jubilee on 14 April but also his birthday two days later. It includes many details from Nordic mythology and the history of Danish legends, but no figures from antiquity apart from the nine muses, in stanza 50, which are identified with Heimdal’s nine mothers, the ‘wave maidens’.

In this poem Grundtvig addressed the new year, 1834, as a little child in its cradle who in middle age would crown the king and finally go to its Father – that is to “Arene Huse-Lof” (the hall of honour) (stanzas 3). 1834 was therefore a national golden year, and the qualities which made Frederik VI’s rule praiseworthy were the principal themes of the year and the poem. Grundtvig touched on the anticipated medal commemorating the king’s recent cure and triumphal return (stanzas 6-7; cf. 35-36), which was then being worked on. But apparently he did not know the details of the plan for the medal’s decoration. He imagined that on the one side it would por-flemming lundgreen-nielsen
tray the ship of fortune on a stormless, waveless sea, all sails set, being propelled "lisurely," by "the power of heat" (stanza 10). Like all other steam-propelled ships of the day, the royal yacht also carried sails. The heat could obviously apply on the one hand to the steam from its engine, but on the other also to the Danes' love for their ruler—and furthermore there is probably a reference to the legendary little king Skjold (Shield), who brought Denmark royal fortune when the country needed a regent. On the other side of the medal Grundtvig imagined the king with a wreath of golden ears of corn on his silver-white hair.

As the following stanzas (13-15 cf. 17) show, this plays a role for the Danish language, and thence to the present, a revival of the mother tongue and renewed respect when the king was to reap what had then been sown. This was not recognized. It is an allusion to the words "One hard, another tender, / One clear as gold and amber, / One like the ocean, dark and deep, / One roaring as the eagle's flight!"

At the end of the poem Grundtvig expressed the wish that the golden year 1834 might have God's blessing in order to reveal the richness of the Danish heart in an interplay between the king and his people. Peace abroad, enlightenment of the people at home, a period of flowering for the Danish language and Danish literature—these were the elements from which the secular Golden Year would grow forth.

On the day of Frederik VI's funeral, 15 January 1840, Grundtvig made a speech in the Danske Samfund in which he proclaimed the king's era to have been a golden age "that was in our midst although we did not recognize it. It is an allusion to the words of John the Baptist about Christ (John 1:26) and apparently signifies a reappearance of the immediate present, which Grundtvig until then had regarded with both criticism and revulsion. On the king's birthday a fortnight later Grundtvig redefined himself, again in the Danske Samfund, for what he had to regard both with criticism and revulsion. On the king's birthday a fortnight later Grundtvig redefined himself, again in the Danske Samfund, for what he had to regard both with criticism and revulsion. On the king's birthday a fortnight later Grundtvig redefined himself, again in the Danske Samfund, for what he had to regard both with criticism and revulsion.

At this point the poem proceeded to request the king to found a Folk High School at 50r0—a regular fashion unparalleled in Danish history since Hjarne sang the praises of Frode Fredegod (an episode mentioned in the 6th Book of Saxo's History of Denmark around 1200). In short, under Frederik VI, Scandinavian spirituality regained its voice, and this voice was more than an "after-blast" (stanza 63), a mere superficial echo of the olden days. In ancient writings—and here Grundtvig is probably thinking of his own translations from 1815-23 of Snorri, Saxo and Beowulf—Scandinavian spirituality found its best way of expressing "What deep in the heart / May still raise joy and pain" (stanza 63). The noble thoughts and resonances of the poets were echoed on the throne and in the king's breast: "It was a toal meeting / Of the living and the dead, / As in a Golden Year!" (stanza 67).

Grundtvig's poem "Onske-Meen" (The Wish Maiden) from February 1839 describes the mythological Nordic goddess Fylla. She was the friend of Balders' mother Frigg, and her task was to arouse the wish "Until in Denmark's Golden Year! / It blissfully be laid to rest!"—because by then it would have been filled. He followed it up in May that same year with the poem "Danmarks Gyldenaaer" (Denmark's Golden Year) in which he saw the beechwoods that had just burst into leaf as a sign that God would send Denmark a long, golden year as beautiful as the midsummer.

An after-effect of Oehlenschläger's death and burial in January 1850 can be noted in an article in Danskeren (The Dane) of 2 March entitled "Guldkronen og Grote-Sangen i Danmark" (The Golden Age and the Grotta Song [an old Icelandic lay] in Denmark). By way of introduction Grundtvig wrote ironically about the laments of the time over the loss of the prince of poets. He found Oehlenschläger as a man and producer of books less interesting than the historical place he occupied. In the course of history the great prince of poets was, he claimed, the very "human spirit" whose childhood and youth lay in the golden and silver ages of grey antiquity. With Oehlenschläger this human spirit enjoyed a resurgence in an age of iron— or rather, of paper; he..."
applied "a genuine layer of gilt to the Iron Age in everything so that it could justly be called a 'Golden Year'." Therefore one should repudiate those who claimed that the Golden Age was but a foolish, childish dream, which they thank their good sense and reason for not having believed in, or taken the slightest notice of, even as children, adding with a haughty mien that even gold's reputation as the noblest metal is but a cloud of smoke that vanishes the moment it is puffed at, for well-consolidated government bonds are at all times just as good at 'the reddest gold', and, when quoted on the Stock Exchange for their owners, even better, being insured against the grasping hands of thieves and many other eventualities.

Faced with such a superficial outlook, Grundtvig had to emphasize that because gold has three great advantages compared with paper, namely brilliance, resonance and durability, it is "a pleasiest image of a life and a period which, in a superior human sense, possess the same qualities". For this reason, those who neither believe in a golden age in the past, nor in a golden year in the future, behave foolishly.

The Danish Golden Year, Grundtvig continued, might be expected to arrive because the Danes had still retained the three principal elements in the life of a nation, these being a sense of patriotism, a mother tongue and friendly solidarity. This engendered hope for a Golden Year, which even in a nation's old age corresponded to its Golden Age. This hope lay behind Grundtvig's frequent comparisons between the reigning Danish king at any given time and king Skjold, Frode Fredegod and some of Denmark's other ancient kings. He therefore concluded by prophesying a new dawn over the plain, that is to say Denmark, "a dawn of freedom and deed" aroused by Frederik VII's accession to the throne, but clearly prepared by his predecessors Frederik VI and Christian VIII.

What Grundtvig wished for Denmark was a new Frode Fredegod period marked by peace, justice and in particular that happiness which in Denmark's history had always been better than reason. Against this background he fully agreed that the Danes should reject worldly "honour and power, wisdom and cunning, admiration and renown". These characteristics had no place in an approaching Danish 'golden year'. Grundtvig's view the aim should rather be to make people's everyday lives golden. He emphasized this in his _Hamning i Verdens-Historien_, III, 1846–96.

In connection with the Italian Renaissance he wrote: the correct art of governing consists, with the common good constantly in mind, in developing a people's energies into the greatest and most beneficial form of activity to which they are equal without wishing on any point whatsoever to force a clarity which is only of value when it comes of its own accord, which it always does when the activity lives to the end of its natural span; for then it becomes, of necessity, aware of itself, whilst every other form of so-called clarity is no more than empty delusion.

The great art consisted in "creating a free and beautiful citizen community of living people", where: handling words, tones, stones and colours in a beautiful way was a far easier matter. Grundtvig's conclusion was therefore that whereas all fine arts are merely wasted on an ugly life, on the other hand a beautiful human life will in itself beautify its surroundings and everything it comes into contact with, so that the difference will only be the same as that which arises between natural and painted rosy cheeks, or at any rate between hothouse plants and such growths and fruits that develop later but are much juicier, stronger, last longer and are more suitable for the season in "free soil under an open sky".

Could it be that Grundtvig regarded part of Denmark's Golden Age culture as an artificially forced hothouse plant?

True art for Grundtvig was a question of arranging one's own existence and that of others in society, not the worship of enthralling illusions. He expressed this even more directly in 1844 when he claimed that the proverb 'wonders will never cease' (as a sailor is said to have shouted at Thorvaldsen's funeral) has long been known, and it is probably the general opinion everywhere. However it is only in connection with very few things that I have the pleasure to share what at present is the 'general opinion', and among them is not the fact that wonders never cease, insofar as what concerns us in this case is by no means the small everyday wonders, and by no means merely the fine arts created by human hands, but in particular the great art of the intellect and the heart to 'beautify life', thus imitating the peerless Artist who creates 'living beauty'.

Unfortunately, Grundtvig continued, this art has been lost amongst statesmen, but by imitating the ancient Greeks and with the help of poets and women (none of whom are as yet represented in modern politics), it can be recovered so that we learn anew to work on what can be done, that is, not on recreating, or improving, but only on calming and beautifying life! It so happens that the former exceeds, as reason indicates, all human power, reason and understanding, so that in this way one merely makes matters worse and, as far as possible, what is good, bad, whereas experience teaches us that the latter can be most wondrously achieved.

This applied in particular if one could liberate oneself from the prejudice that beauty presupposes the very strictest order at the expense of freedom, life and the best abilities, for no work can in any possible way become greater than the force which produces it, and the experience of millennia teaches us that all the noble forces of human nature thrive only in freedom and thereby away in 'thraldom'.

The real issue as far as Grundtvig was concerned was the discovery of the true identity of the people, spread through a Danish community way of life, plain, cheerful and active – the plain as a counterpart to the beautiful, the cheerful to the ugly, the active to the drowsy. This way of life, and not a cultivation of the activities of a cultural elite, constituted the true 'golden age', which Grundtvig nearly always rechristened a 'golden year' and placed in the near future.

He did so again in 1864. His poem in commemoration of Frederik VII was called "Danmarks Guld-Alder og Gylden-Aar" (Denmark's Golden Age and Golden Year) and compared – a month before the shocking retreat from Dannevirk – Balder's and Frode's golden age with the golden years under Frederik VI and Frederik VII. In his cycle of poems _Nordens Myther_ (Myths of the North), written after the defeat in that same year, when the military and political catastrophe weighed heavily upon the whole country, but not published until 1930, he let the Northern goddess of love, Freyja, weep tears of longing for her vanished husband as an image of an amputated Denmark. Characteristically, however, here he was also able to convert the pain of death throes into birth pains and turn the misfortune into a hope of resurrection. For Freyja's tears – according to Snorri's _Edda_ – were of gold, her heart wounds smelled of roses and the smile of joy could be seen through the veil of sorrow.

Grundtvig saw this attitude as being typically Danish. He saw Denmark preferably in the figure of a woman – be it the Freyja of Nordic mythology, the mermaid of the folk ballads, or the New Testament's widow of Nain – or all in one. He saw Denmark in the perspective of world history as a historic idyll – just as Thaarup had represented it in _Høst-Gidet – indescribably lovely_. In the same way that ancient Greece was the home of the idyll and the idyllic poetry that takes place in nature, Denmark was the country of the historic idyll. It was demonstrated not only by Thaarup but also in the folk ballads:

Their soul is hero-love, which brings forth only historic, idyllic scenes insofar as a historical event fills the foreground and breathes significance into the everyday, quiet, friendly life whereby, in conjunction with the heroic life, it becomes deeply poetic.

Grundtvig wrote these words to Ingemann on 5 October 1843 when the two friends were correspond-
would have preferred a description of the heroes’ childhood homes and seen “the interior at Finnse­ville where Absalon’s mother and his siblings lived, the house where the heroic heart evidently belonged”.

In his Mand Mønte lectures in 1838 he burst out, happily surprised to be able to mention the Copen­hagen Liberty Memorial (fig. 67) in the same breath as the French Revolution’s Tree of Liberty: “It is strange how idyllically everything historic manifests and unites itself in Denmark.” Both the memorial and Thatarup’s Singspiel came to express

in the most natural way in the world the relationship between the free peasant and the citizenry of the capital, indeed it became a lovely omen of the fine yet natural Danish taste that would develop in the Peasant Era in the course of a living inter­play between rural areas and the capital.

In 1838, slightly more than halfway through life, Grundtvig himself had changed his approach. By placing increasingly greater emphasis on the farming class and the rural population he was approaching a national-cum-Christian cultural synthesis that was to grow into a movement of hitherto unknown strength in Denmark. In the last of these Mand Mønte lectures, given on 26 November 1838, he spoke of his own endeavors to find a more conciliatory attitude regarding the struggles and conflicts in which he had hitherto allowed himself to become embroiled.

It so happens that I have abandoned my old claim: the more struggle, the more life. I realize now it should be the more struggle, the more life in danger, which may result in: more death. It is necessary to peaceful activity is procured by an open race rather than by hostilities - and one for human beings, not a horse-race.

In this way he created a background for what was after all, a peaceful political way of life characteristic of the Danish social and political pattern after the June Constitution of 1849. Those who grew up with

such a spirited and bright view of mankind in all its national, ecclesiastical and scientific contexts, which throughout Christendom can and surely will give to all peoples a Golden Year in which enlightenment of life will out all the literary jack-o’-lanterns and show the world what peoples have been created for and are capable of.

4. FROM GOLDEN AGE TO GOLDEN YEAR

During the Danish Golden Age, as the term is normally understood nowadays during festive weeks and ‘Cultural Capital of Europe’ celebrations, Grundtvig was an outsider.

The operetta-like Copenhagen one all too easily associates with the Golden Age was certainly not the Copenhagen Grundtvig saw. The Tivoli Gardens, plucky Danish soldiers, public holidays being celebrated on the ramparts, balls, ballets and vaudevilles, all passed over his head. He lacked the Copenhagen’s lightheartedness and appetite for harmless diversions.

The earnestly lofty – Oehlenschläger’s preferred element in tragedies and occasional poems – held no appeal for him either. As a young man Grundtvig had been a totally unenthusiastic member of Kron­prinzen Livcorps (The Crown Prince’s Life Corps) during the Battle of Copenhagen, which he had watched, in Oehlenschläger’s company and without poetic exaltation, from a balcony in the aristocratic Bredgade quarter and also from Langelinie, Copenhagen’s favourite promenade along the harbour front. On the other hand, in January 1843 he switched right over to exaggerated pathos at the Twelfth Night mobilization of Copenhagen’s students, which the king had been unable to make any use of and was moreover regarded by more dispassionate contemporary observers as touching on the parodic.

Grundtvig later sought genuinely Danish and Copenhagen characteristics in a more peaceful and ordinary road, Strandvejen (the Coast Road) north of Copenhagen, With his penetrating gaze he noted the symbion in the capital’s position between the Søndre Kongsgydet (the Royal Fairway outside the harbour, where the Battle of Copenhagen took place in 1801) and Charlottenlund with its spreading beech trees. Here was the pledge of a Danish future:

Greatness and loveliness must actually merge, life and innovation unite in the victorious nature which must be able to take up the struggle against a capital’s tastefully concealed and garnished artific­iality, and even more against the artificial play of nature’s lively shadows, which so easily appear to be both lovelier and richer than nature herself; but where greatness and loveliness merge so splendidly in our Strandvejen, where the sea espous­es the beechwoods, the waves sing bass in the birds’ choir and the ships, which bring novelties and inspire activity, at the same time invigorate and constantly transform the views …

that was where one could obtain the genuine histori­cal and idyllic impression. The splendid thing about Thatarup’s old, half-forgotten Singspiel was its very combination of “the natural and the historical, the real and the dreamed, the everyday and the ceremonial, the simple and the majestic, the popular and the royal”.47

On the strength of this sharp-eyed appraisal of the Danish national character Grundtvig perhaps deserves after all to be acknowledged as part of Copenhagen’s Golden Age. Many of the writers and artists of the time cultivated interiors, children, domestic animals, gardens, chicken pens and, when aiming really high, the narrow lane and woods just outside. Grundtvig provides this intimate and near­sighted idyll with a much-needed expansion, supplement­ing it with the big world and interpreting the union as a symbol of a secular golden year of peace, justice and above all happiness, the Danes’ specific element. And for Grundtvig, happiness was above all inherent in the feminine. It is therefore significant that he should have seized the comparatively new understanding at the time for the home, the family and the female sex as the preserves of sincerity, mild­ness and love – in short, the most genuinely human and at the same time closest to God’s finest creations. His achievement was having the courage to reformu­late this understanding so as to apply it to Denmark’s God-given place in the history of the world. Just as women were hjerte-lige (‘more heart-like’, i.e. warmer, sincerer) than men, Denmark was a kvind­folk (female people), hjertefolket (the people of the heart), God’s own country in the new era.
In fact this feeling could even be transposed to the religious. When Grundtvig in 1836 was to compose for his Song-Værk a new Danish version of the 89th Psalm of David about the longing for God's dwellings he first wrote “Munter og rolig” (Cheerful and peaceful), thought better of it and changed it to “Hyggelig, rolig, / Gud er din Bolig” (Cosy, God is thy dwelling) and then also to “Inderlig skiøn” (Profoundly beautiful). If he was able to associate the 85th Psalm of David about the longing for God's presence in the temple with “Hyggelig, rolig, / Gud er din Bolig” he could also naturally understand the Danish Golden Age not incapable of appreciating this small world, but without destroying its accurate picture of familiar everyday life, in giving it the greatest histori­cal, ecclesiastical and religious dimensions. For him, the Golden Age became inevitably a Golden Year.

Translated by David Hohnen

NOTES

The original Danish text of this lecture was published in an expanded version in the yearbook Grundtvig Studier 1995, pp. 177-439 with an English summary, pp. 317-18.


3. In an MS. from 1841 on Nordic mythology Grundtvig described the rewards to be obtained from a visit to Minna's Fountain of Wisdom: “... when one then looks down into the well all the squire parties and steam-engines and Tivolis have vanished, and one sees nothing but great men and events from the days of yore” (Fesz. 283-284). On the Tivolis speeches reported or printed in the press or in pamphlets, see Steen Johansen, Bibliografi over N. F. Grundtvigs Smijte, 1932, pp. 152-163, 210-211, 74-75. The party in 1846 is reported in Grundtvigs Erindringer og Eremitager om Grundtvig, edited by Steen Johansen and Hennin Hansen, 1984, pp. 213-216.


11. Cf. unpublished speech, 8 May 1841, in the Danish Samfund, Fesz. 34-35.


