12. Concepts of Freedom Reflected in Danish Literature 1754-1802

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In his memorial speech for king Frederik IV, given in Latin to the Senate of the University of Copenhagen on 12 December 1730, Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754), professor, historian, essayist, poet and playwright, remembered the reign of the deceased monarch for its liberal atmosphere: "We spoke as if we were living in a free state, we joked and jested, we vied in cheerfulness without fear. For he would not be angered by free speech and indiscreet expression, and if by chance he was offended, his anger subsided without the lash".[572] The king's subjects could behave *as if* they lived in a free state, not in an absolute monarchy without legal protection of such liberties. During the enlightened form of hereditary absolutism introduced in 1660, no crime was punished harder than lese-majesty (*Crimen læsæ majestatis*). The codification *Danish Law* (*Danske Lov*) of Christian V from 1683 details the obligations and duties of the subjects to the King, but not–or much less–vice versa. Drawing on a philosophy purportedly borrowed from ancient pre-republican Rome, it was stated that the people had handed over power to the king and his dynasty. It should be noted that many sections of *Danish Law* had been taken directly from the new constitution, *The Royal Law* (*Kongeloven*) of Frederik III from 1665, which was not published in full until a de luxe edition with limited circulation appeared in 1709. Holberg reprinted the entire text in 1729 in his more widely distributed book *Description of Denmark and Norway* (*Dannemarks og Norges Beskrivelse*) but understandably without any editorial comments.

Two messages about personal freedom

The American Declaration of Independence of 4 July 1776 was introduced after a delay of two months on 2 September in the Danish newspaper *Berlingske Tidende*, then called *The Copenhagen News* (*Kiøbenhavnske Tidender*). The journalist in his Danish translation loyally quoted the famous words: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men

are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Also reproduced is the ensuing assertion that governments are instituted among men to safeguard these rights, and if they fail to do so, it is the privilege of the people to alter or abolish such destructive forms of government. The original declaration's lengthy attack on the British king for having misgoverned his American colonies had been abbreviated considerably, and the name of the monarch was not given. After all the mother of the Danish king Christian VII was a daughter of the English king Georg II, and Christian himself had been married to Caroline Mathilde, a daughter of king Georg III. The sensational front page news from America provoked no editorial comment and started no public debate on human rights.[573]

A follow-up came thirteen years later with the French Declaration of Human Rights of 26 August 1789.[574] Again Danish newspapers printed the text without comments. The liberal Copenhagen periodical *The Minerva* published a sympathetic analysis of it by the editor, Norwegian-born C. Pram, a distinguished state official.[575] A German translation of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* from 1791 was printed and sold in Copenhagen in the following year without interference from the authorities. Until the execution of the French king in January 1793, many enlightened Danes were in favour of the French revolution. Maybe a public discussion of human rights was missing because the Danish middle-class along with the progressive cosmopolitan part of the nobility (primarily of German descent) believed that what was being done by force regarding necessary social improvements in France had already occurred through peaceful reforms in Denmark. As early as 1755 the Danish administration had called for ideas from all honest patriots (in Danish *retskafne Patrioter*) for agricultural innovations, and ever since the sixteen-year old Crown Prince in 1784 had replaced his insane father as de facto ruler of the country, most Danes felt that they had a benevolent government, especially as committee work resulted in the emancipation of the peasants in 1788 that brought about a fundamental change in Danish agriculture. At least that was the assessment then

Right: Frihedsstøtten (The Obelisk of Freedom) in Copenhagen. Engraving by Georg Christian Schule 1803. The Liberty Monument celebrated legislation to free the peasants in 1788. It was constructed 1792-97 during the French Revolution.

and as well as in most later historical research.[576] As a consequence citizens seemed not to feel any urge to debate rights, such as personal freedom and the pursuit of happiness. The abolition of the slave trade in the Danish colonies followed in 1792 (with a ten-year period of expiration). Significantly a monument celebrating the freedom of the peasants (*Frihedsstøtten,* the Obelisk of Freedom) was erected by grateful citizens of Copenhagen just outside of the Western gate of the city. The Crown Prince laid the foundation stone on 31 July 1792 and the monument was completed in 1797.[577] At its base, marble statues of four larger-than-life women symbolise respectively Fidelity, Civic Virtue, Agricultural Industry and Courage (in Danish *Troskab, Borgerdyd, Agerdyrkningsflid, Tapperhed*). They wear robes like ancient Greek goddesses and have nothing to do with contemporary Danish peasantry, nor with a general idea of personal freedom. According to a critical pamphlet about the project from August 1791 they had been planned to feature Phrygian caps, the favourite headgear of the French revolutionaries, but the rumour was untrue. There was no direct symbol of freedom attached to the monument.

The brief dictatorship 1770-2 by the king's personal physician J.F. Struensee may also have dampened popular desire for modern rights. The Danes had experienced how the ideas of equality and personal freedom could turn an energetic and restless innovator into a tyrant and cause unforeseen upheaval. Even–perhaps, especially–after the violent toppling of the king in France, Denmark was calm and the people remained loyal monarchists. The mood was, as the philosopher Tyge Rothe (who died in 1795) remarked, "Christian-ish", *Christiansk,* a play on the name of the King.[578]

Censorship

In 1770 Struensee, in the name of the king, issued a bill on freedom of the press that was the most progressive in Europe and was hailed by the aging Voltaire.[579] Anything could now be printed–and almost was. The bill resulted in publication of an immense body of anonymous literature, especially in Copenhagen. A collection by the state official and learned scholar Bolle Willum Luxdorph comprises more than 900 titles. A good deal of them had under the shelter of anonymity been directed against named persons and were slanderous. The law was therefore amended by Struensee in 1771 with a paragraph intro-

ducing the concept of an author's or printer's responsibility, but still it was possible to print matters which were prohibited in other European states. After the fall of Struensee on 17 January 1772, censorship, by a decree of 20 October 1773, was placed with the local chief constables, who were supposed to make their own judgement and their decisions were final and could not be appealed. The authorities watched in particular the newspapers very carefully, because they might endanger either the Danish foreign policy of neutrality or the relation between the state and the Protestant church and its Lutheran creed, but until the middle of the 1790s there were practically no trials against writers of books, in fact none at all before 1786. Rather than an obstacle, censorship was a friendly aid to inexperienced writers, a forerunner of a not yet established professional and public criticism.[580] The Danish administration probably saw freedom of the press as a safety valve: people could point out abuses and suggest alternatives. In 1790 the censorship institution was abolished and all cases concerning freedom of the press were transferred to the courts–a positive moderation. In 1799, however, after pressure from England and Russia, the Crown Prince had to restrict the freedom of book authors through a revised bill of printing.[581] Severe penalties were introduced and actually applied. By that time the Crown Prince himself had gotten tired of the growing "press-insolence" and general "writers' itch" (in Danish *Pressefrækhed* and *Skrivesyge*), because scribblers did not spare himself personally from criticism. He commanded his officials to take the necessary steps against these "scabby heads" (*skurvede Hoveder*). From 1799 to 1848-9 Denmark in fact experienced a re-established censorship. The local police authorities had to inspect every journal and periodical and all books of less than 384 pages, before they could be distributed and sold. The immediate result in 1799-1800 was the exile for life of two gifted but admittedly very provocative political satirists, P.A. Heiberg and Malthe Conrad Bruun, both of which settled down in Paris. In the first half of the nineteenth century trials against the amateurish idealist and self-styled spokesman for civil liberty, Dr. J.J. Dampe (1821), and the well-known clergyman, historian, poet and later parliamentarian N.F.S. Grundtvig (1826) marked the enduring presence of the 1799 decree. The prominent jurist A.S. Ørsted was silenced without a trial in 1826 but allowed to keep his public offices and even served as prime minister 1853-4.[582]

Focus on personal freedom

The general European trend in the eighteenth century towards individualism could not be prevented from entering the Danish composite kingdom. Although regular political discussion, which to many seemed superfluous in Denmark, was stopped by a law that prohibited even "grumbling" (in Danish *skumle*) about the absolute king and his administration, in poetry and fiction it was possible to take up the new ideas and embody them in interesting characters and actions. Selected texts from the belles-lettres of the post-Holberg period may demonstrate how and why this was done. All relevant authors cannot be covered but notable features in selected works will suffice.

The background to every writer in the period is the achievement by Holberg of a humanistic individualism increasingly detached from Christian thinking and Protestant theology. Holberg's successful technique in this dangerous field was to pose questions rather than to suggest answers, and his two clashes with state censorship over the satirical national epic *Peder Paars* and the Latin Utopian novel *Niels Kliim* in, respectively, 1719-20 and 1741 led to no convictions. However, since Holberg when writing fiction mainly used various forms of comical literature, not least some thirty-five comedies, and furthermore as a classicist adhered to a set tradition of genres and subgenres, it is hard to tell whether he is reflecting contemporary thinking or simply continuing themes from ancient Greece and Rome or from seventeenth century France. In contrast, Holberg's essays and autobiography clearly debate current ideas, for the first time in Danish literature making the private individual and the personality of an author the object of psychological probing. Using himself and his surroundings as examples, Holberg never stopped wondering at the absurdity of humanity that claimed to be reasonable but regularly disavowed this in action, carried away by uncontrollable passions. As a comedy writer attracted by extremes, Holberg the philosopher usually preferred the middle course and paid due respect to practical Danish common sense. Politically Holberg was a wholehearted supporter of Danish absolutism which to him seemed –and in fact was – an improvement over the confused social and administrative conditions in the decades before 1660.[583] Holberg firmly believed that political and social reforms should come from the leaders of a society, not from the people.[584] The English parliamentary tradition which was stressed by modern political philosophers (Molesworth,

Montesquieu, La Beaumelle) Holberg did not appreciate, and in his novel *Niels Kliim* he described the republicanism of a fictitious "Land of Freedom" as an irrevocable step from a clan-structured society to anarchy (the most distinguished families have to have private sentries to guard their homes and property).

The only other great name in Danish poetry in the first half of the eighteenth century was the clergyman and hymn writer H.A. Brorson who died in 1764. As a pietist Brorson emphasised the personal conversion of each individual but of course supported common Christian doctrine on human nature.

Only after the middle of the eighteenth century can we trace new ideas of personal freedom. To educate talented people to advance themselves as writers, scholars and scientists, academies were established. In Denmark this included The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters of 1742, The Royal Danish Society for the History of the Country of 1745 and The Society for the Advancement of Fine Arts and Useful Sciences of 1759 (popularly known as the Society for Good Taste). Less learned and more geared to conviviality around a punch bowl was The Norwegian Society 1772-1814, a club for young Norwegian students in Copenhagen centered around the witty phlegmatic idler and poetic improviser J. H. Wessel. The Society for Danish Literature 1775-81 functioned as a fan club for the Danish pre-romantic poet Johannes Ewald and closed down after his death. All these associations are defined in purely secular terms and not connected in any way with the Lutheran state church, in contrast to the University of Copenhagen.

At the same time, a new type of poet emerged. In the main Holberg had happily followed French classicism in adopting commonly accepted patterns from ancient or at least older literature (for instance Molière's plays). However, by the 1760s the poet saw himself as a genius, a creator under God (*sub Jove*), and the favourite example of the age was William Shakespeare who seemingly violated all set rules of good classical writing in order to express himself and his chaotic inner turmoil. The entire period of *Sturm und Drang* in 1770s German literature promoted this ideal. Poetry became the way of getting in touch with the core of the world and the secrets of life, and as such it could function as a substitute for religious faith as was the case later in the various phases of romanticism. James Macpherson's Ossian-poems (1760-5), which

A painting by N. Abildgaard, showing Ossian as an old man
in the woods, was reproduced as an engraving by J.F. Clemens 1787

eventually were considered to be frauds, may not have been estimated as much in England as in Scotland and on the Continent where the centenarian white-bearded, now blind warrior, scald and priest of Nordic paganism was widely accepted as a genuine historical character who also presented an emblematic image of the poet understood as seer and prophet.

Klopstock

The new definition of a poet became evident in Copenhagen in the shape of the German poet F.G. Klopstock (1724-1803). He had been brought to Copenhagen in 1750-1 on a royal scholarship by the leading statesman of the kingdom, the Hanoverian count J.H.E. Bernstorff

–in fact he was paid well to finish his hexameter epic in 20 songs on Christ, *Messiah* (*Der Messias),* 1748-73, having no other duties whatsoever. Though Klopstock after the dismissal of Bernstorff moved permanently to Hamburg in 1770, he stayed on the pay-roll of the Danish king till his death thirty-three years later. He wrote exclusively in German and never learned Danish. In three plays, *The Battle of Hermann* (*Hermanns Schlacht*), 1769, *Hermann and the Princes* (*Hermann und die Fürsten*), 1784, and *The Death of Hermann* (*Hermanns Tod*), 1787, he revived the Germanic hero Hermann (or Arminius), who once fought for national liberty against the Roman general Varro and his army in the Teutoburger Forest, but finally was betrayed and killed by his own countrymen. In other words, the trilogy ends in an early version of the German stab legend (*Dolchstoßlegende*). In 1789 Klopstock was quite enthusiastic about the French Revolution and composed solemn odes in its praise. In return the French National Assembly in 1792 made Klopstock an honorary French citizen, along with so many other early enthusiasts.

Johannes Ewald

The leading Danish poet of the period was Johannes Ewald (1743-81), who had met Klopstock in Copenhagen in 1769. As a graduate of the Gymnasium (the "Latin school") in the town of Schleswig, Ewald spoke German fluently and became an intimate friend of Klopstock who encouraged him to write plays. Ewald's ensuing works, though politically loyal to the absolutist system, contain ideas of personal freedom which the author himself hardly could control.

Ewald's first attempt was a tragedy from 1769 in the style of French classicism (mainly written in Alexandrines), *Adam and Eve.* The Old Testament story's grand theme of the Fall gives Ewald the opportunity to discuss Freedom and Obedience. His Adam is pious and dutiful, but Eve is tempted by Satan to make her own choice independently of Adam. In the words of Irmiel, the friendly angel who follows the action without being allowed to interfere: "Adam has given his heart to his mate, and she is to elect just as freely as he, but will she do this as well as he has done?"[585] Satan can do nothing against the will of Adam but succeeds in bending the will of Eve. The way the playwright unfolds the well-known narrative makes it clear that freedom is dangerous and causes of the fall of all. Yet Ewald cannot quite go through with this moral lesson

and in a daring contradiction of the Biblical narrative inserts Christ as the heroic saviour of the fallen pair from the angel of Death, a Redeemer long before his crucifixion. Though Ewald had taken care to write precise stage directions which were within the scope of the Royal Theatre, the play was never performed.

In 1775 Ewald published a heroic singspiel in three acts called *The Death of Balder*, with seventeen musical numbers, all of them elaborating on aspects of the plot but none of them shaping or influencing its course of events. Ewald's source is a story from Saxo Grammaticus' Latin *Chronicle of Denmark* written in the decades around 1200. It deals with the love of the pagan demigod Balder for Nanna, daughter of a soothsayer and fiancée of the Norwegian prince Hother. The war-god Thor acts as the reflective confidant of Balder, in vain trying to warn him against his passion. From the Icelandic *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson, Ewald has included the ambiguous character Loki as an evil demon corresponding to Satan in *Adam and Eve*, a tempter and seducer.

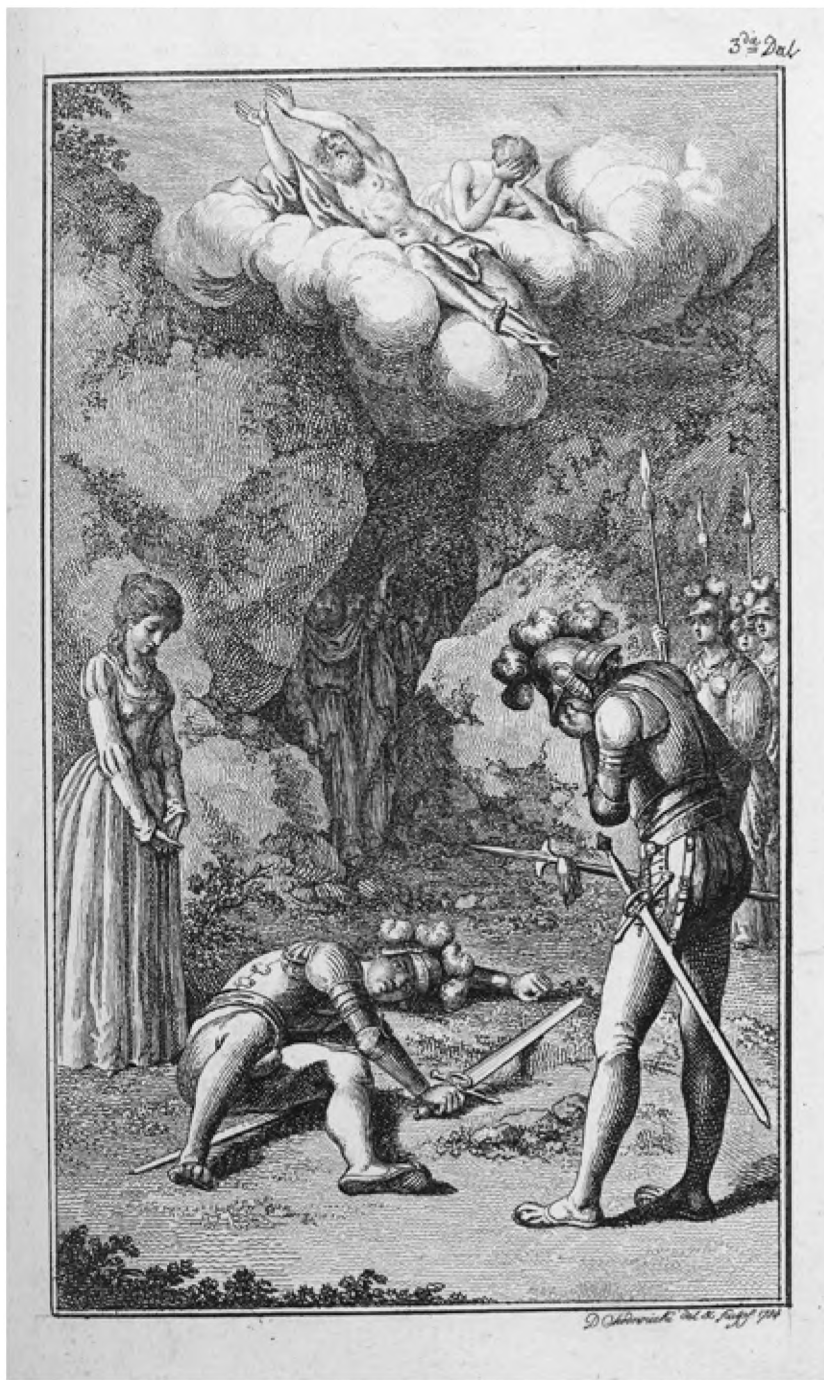
Ewald in this versified dramatization of ancient Nordic mythology has abandoned Christian beliefs and paid much more attention to free will and freedom to choose. But as a playwright he seems quite uncertain whether he should delve into a psychological explanation of his characters or assume a predetermined course of action that leaves them all as puppets manipulated by an invisible higher hand.

The conclusion of the play is evidence of this for Ewald came up with no less than three versions. In the realistic setting–a wild Norwegian mountain landscape with Hother hunting bears–Ewald inserts supernatural powers. Hother is equipped by Loki with a Balder-killing spear prepared through magic by three goddesses of fate (valkyries), who, incidentally, express themselves in an excellently composed musical trio. Misinterpretation by the protagonists of what goes on is a constant feature of the play, an element from comedy composition unhappily transposed to tragedy. Humiliated and disarmed in a fight with Balder and wrongly believing to be rejected by Nanna, prince Hother wants to save his honour by committing suicide with the magical spear, but in the end a duel suddenly arises between the two rivals. Nanna, clearly loyal to her Hother, watches from the distance, feeling flattered, curious and a bit coquettish about the whole thing. In Ewald's first version Hother, scorned by the desperate Balder, wilfully kills him with

the fatal spear, but Ewald's advisors told him that this would detract too much from the sympathetic Hother's honour as a hero. He then came up with a second ending in which Hother killed his opponent blindly in a rage and only later realised what he had done. This still tainted Hother's character, and in the third and final version Ewald made Balder run berserk, stumble and spear himself on the lethal weapon. As he dies, according to a stage direction, "a mighty whirlwind passes over the scene". In short, Hother remains noble and entirely innocent, and Balder becomes the victim of his own excessive passion. The scene seems rather contrived. At any rate it was difficult to perform convincingly and was rightly detested by actors who had to control the preplanned 'accidental' ways of the weapons.

Ewald's Balder-figure is typical of the sentimentalism of the 1770s, all emotion, all self-pity, whereas the real hero is stoically self-controlled Hother who thinks more highly of his honour as a prince than of his love for Nanna, and precisely for that reason he deserves to keep Nanna. In a final roundelay–a conventional dramatic tool giving each surviving character a stanza to sing–four interpretations of the reason for Balder's death are offered. Thor blames his uncontrollable passion, "love, base love". The valkyrie Rota blames the demonic Loki's cunning, his "falsehood". Hother blames Balder's lofty mind, his "heart with virtue glowing", his sense of fairness refusing to kill Hother when he could, and Nanna blames fate "alone", thus acquitting herself. Accordingly the play oscillates between the psychology of motives and the mythology of predetermination, and it remains an unanswered question whether any of the characters were strong enough to make a personal choice that could have prevented the tragic solution to the conflict. Clearly the idea of personal freedom has been on the author's mind but has not been developed into a workable tool.

The Death of Balder was an accurate reflection of the mood of its time. It was successfully played for the stage-struck (and insane) Danish king in February 1778 in a private show–without musical numbers or elaborate sets. At the behest of the king, music was composed by Court conductor Johann Hartmann (1726-93) and costly sets and presumably historically correct costumes were created. In celebration of the king's birthday in January 1779, the play was performed at the Royal Theatre with all possible pomp and became a regular hit with the Copenhagen audience. It made Old Norse topics popular among people who had not previ-



ously been aware of this aspect of the national past. To the poet-king of Danish romanticism, Adam Oehlenschläger, it became inspiration for his fine play *Baldur the Good* in his trilogy *Norse Poems* from 1807, and much later Ewald's Balder-text was employed as an important clue in both Karen Blixen's short story "Sorrow-Acre" from her *Winter's Tales*, 1942, and Martin A. Hansen's diary novel *The Liar*, 1950, in both cases connected with the theme of egotistical personal freedom versus social and ethical obligations.

In *The Death of Balder* Ewald may have been uncertain whether to assume his protagonist had a free will or was a victim of inevitable doom, but in his unfinished or deliberately fragmentary autobiography he discussed the idea of personal freedom in more definite details. The text had been written in 1774-8, passages were printed for the first time in four instalments in two periodicals 1804-8, but the entire manuscript was not published until 1855. It was called *Levnet og Meeninger* (*Life and Opinions*), a borrowing from Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, 1760-7. In chapter 2 of *Levnet og Meeninger*, "Vinflasken" (The Wine Bottle), Ewald conducts an analysis of his own multifaceted self: "I have in fact always had something Don Quixotic in my character that resulted from a proud heart's enthusiastic love for freedom combined with hot-headed imagination".[586] Cervantes' famous novel (1605-16) had just been published in an excellent and long-lived Danish translation in 1776-7 by C.D. Biehl, a female playwright of the previous decade whom Ewald had replaced in the repertory of the Royal Theatre. In modern scholarship Ewald's so-called autobiography is rightly studied as a novel or a meta-novel, but in the romantic era readers took it to be the historical truth about the unruly poet. Admittedly, in Ewald as in Cervantes, it is hard to distinguish irony from earnestness, and that may exactly be the point of both writers. Later in the context of childhood war-games, Ewald mentions "the natural disposition everybody has to be free" which accounts for his fondness for hussars who, in contrast to common infantrymen, are individualists doing old-fashioned heroic deeds.[587] In short, Ewald considers freedom to be one of the greatest goods on earth. He claims that ever since his childhood he has been led by two main factors, an inclination to be noticed and an inclination

Left: The Death of Balder. Engraving from *Ewalds Samtlige Skrifter* 3 (Copenhagen 1787).

to be free. He attributes this first of all to an innate pride, but he also derives it from a certain indolence that he thinks is caused by his detestation of the monotony involved in regular work, such as a parson's constant production of sermons.[588] In this theoretical debate as well as in his actual life Ewald is heralding types of later romantic literature such as the idle wanderer, the carefree minstrel and good-for-nothing (in German *ein Taugenichts*) who lives for the moment without thought for the morrow. Freedom comes close to be identified as carelessness if not irresponsibility.

Summing up his observations, Ewald finds his own personality to be dominated by a strong tendency to the fictional (in Danish *romanagtig*) and fantastic. Having run away from home at sixteen and gone to Germany, he felt, he says, that his desire to be free was fully satisfied. Independence transcended homesickness and convinced Ewald that his fate was his own responsibility and to be determined by his ingenuity, his heart and his arm ("min Forstand, mit Hjerte og min Arm"[589]), of course along with God and Luck, as he commented, perhaps mockingly. Even allowing for Ewald's repeated references to his Quixotic predisposition, such praise of personal freedom was unheard of in Danish literature before 1700.

Ewald's last play, *The Fishermen* from 1779, is another versified singspiel, this time about an actual shipwreck at the north coast of Zealand in November 1774.[590] The text describes how some poor fishermen do not dare to brave the storm to save the pound net that means everything to them economically, but they willingly risk their lives to save the last survivor of a sinking English ship. There are eighteen musical numbers, all of which carry the action forward except the most famous of them, "King Christian stood by lofty mast", which almost immediately was elevated to Danish royal anthem. Once more the performance at the Royal Theatre was successful. Ewald himself was present at the opening night in January 1780, although he was ailing and had to be carried to the theatre on a stretcher.

The moral of *The Fishermen* is patriotic rather than individualistic: as "Danes"–the word is used frequently in some scenes and even more so in the rough draft–they are courageous and do not hold materialistic values such as gold or land. They refuse to take money from the foreign captain whom they have saved; instead their collapsed economy

is remedied by a rich old Danish nobleman who lives abroad but happens to pass by their village as a nostalgic tourist. In other words, Ewald turns from the optimistic individualism of unlimited freedom to an equally optimistic collectivism, namely the ideal of Danish charity and solidarity even with foreigners. As far as is known, Ewald ended his life in unconditional submission to a sincerely held pietism. He died in 1781, thirty-seven years old but physically entirely broken.

Among the Danish romantics, Adam Oehlenschläger regarded Ewald as a solitary pyramid in the Egyptian desert.[591] He is perhaps the greatest of all Danish authors, but the time was not yet ripe for his individualistic and psychological approach to national identity.

Changing ideas of freedom

Immediately after Crown Prince Frederik's seizure of power in a regular coup in 1784, the young Copenhagen critic Knud Lyne Rahbek (1760-1830) founded a periodical called *Minerva* which appeared from 1785 until 1808. It was read in educated middle-class circles in Copenhagen and definitely helped form a public opinion which so far had missed a suitable medium. Rahbek and his more zealous co-editor C. Pram considered civil rights and civil freedom as an ideal the limits of which should be determined by law, not by the king who himself should be subject to the law. To a large extent this programme was not different from the practical goals of the reformist period of the young Crown Prince. He was so popular because he, as P.A. Heiberg said, with noble boldness emancipated *thought* (freedom of the press), the *peasants* (abolition of feudal bondage, "adscription") and the *slaves* (ban on the slave trade in the Danish West Indies).[592]

On the occasion of his wedding in 1790, the Crown Prince and his consort were greeted in the Royal Theatre by a singspiel in one act, *Høst-Gildet* (*Harvest Feast*), placed in an unnamed but typical Zealand village. The playwright, Thomas Thaarup (1749-1821), had carefully created a harmonious and festive mood, stressing the happy idyll in the conglomerate state of Denmark, Norway and Holstein (which were the privileged parts of the realm included in the *Law of Indigenous Rights* from 1776). The younger brother of the king, prince Frederik, and some reactionary noblemen in the audience were displeased with some lines of praise from the simple peasants in the play in which it was sug-

gested that the king had ennobled the peasantry and that a peasant can be a nobleman too. However the royal groom was satisfied, and the aristocrats had to swallow this democratic insult[593] which was underlined by the inclusion of a modest monument to peasant emancipation (a *Frihedsstøtte*) in the stage props. It consisted of rough-hewn stones topped by a sheaf and crowned by a hat, probably a Phrygian cap symbolising freedom.[594]

Norwegian ideas of freedom

Quite another idea of freedom than Ewald's psychological one thrived in the Norwegian Society located in the narrow Copenhagen street Sværtegade. Since the Calmar Union of 1397 Norway had been ruled from Copenhagen by the Danish monarch. However, ever since the Middle Ages Norwegians had been able to uphold the ancient legal practice of *Odelsret*, meaning the right of peasants as freeholders (*Odelsbønder*) to inherit their farms. Whatever inferiority complexes Norwegian students in Copenhagen might harbour, on this one issue they were superior and looked down upon the suppressed Danish peasantry for its patience with tyrannical landowners. In contrast, Norway was the homeland of heroes (*Kiemper*) and of freedom. Even Danish writers envied Norway in this respect, and the historian Tyge Rothe in books from the 1780s assumed wrongly that *Odelsret*, which was mainly known from old Norwegian sources, originally had prevailed in all Scandinavian countries.[595] Undoubtedly this revered tradition of native liberty was taken up at this time because of Rousseau's predilection for primitive down-to-earth life as more authentic than refined city culture. The theme of *Odelsret* did not inspire immortal poetry but was expressed in a renewed bucolic literature of both poetry and prose. In his historical poem "Hagen Adelsteen" from 1793, Claus Frimann first depicts a situation in which a Danish copyholder is rudely reminded by his feudal lord to pay his rent, while in another scene the Norwegian freeholder ("Odelsmanden") is sitting quietly in the shade of his brick wall, stroking his silver-grey beard and looking at the golden meadows surrounding his house. Frimann concludes that if anybody–maybe the Danish administration?–were to take away the consuetudinary rights of the Norwegian yeomanry ("Hævderetten"), their mind for lively speech and effective expression, even their fierce competitiveness ("den Ild, den Lue-Brand i Bryst") with other nations would be lost (stanza 5-6 of 57).[596] The historical reality of Norwegian freeholding undoubtedly

contributed to the emergence of an independent Norwegian national identity leading up to Norway's secession from Denmark in 1814. Of the 112 representatives signing the Eidsvoll constitution on 17 May that year, three were former members of the Norwegian Society in Copenhagen. Freeholding is expressly mentioned as a permanent legal right for all Norwegians in § 107.

Another aspect of Norwegian patriotism in Copenhagen is furnished by Edvard Storm (1749-94) in a popular historical song, "Zinklars Vise" ("The Ballad of Zinklar"), written in an archaic style borrowed from late medieval anonymous Danish ballads (*folkeviser*). Storm retells an episode from the Danish-Swedish Calmar war: on 26 August 1612, 1400 Scottish mercenaries in Swedish service were ambushed in the Gudbrand's Valley on their way to Stockholm and killed by patriotic Norwegian peasants acting as volunteers in lieu of regular soldiers. Storm emphasises that the Scotsmen were paid in Swedish money to risk their lives, whereas the Norwegians fought for their own country and its (Danish) king. The moral is that not a single soul returned to

Frontispiece to Edvard Storm's *Samlede Digte* (Collected Poems) (Copenhagen 1785). An imagined monument celebrating patriotic Norwegians from a battle fought in 1612 (se note 597).

Scotland to tell how dangerous it is to visit "those that live among the Norwegian mountains" (stanza 18).[597] The song was printed in 1782 in the periodical *Dansk Museum* and often reprinted and included in songbooks. Though exaggerated in terms of fallen enemies–only 300 fell, not 1400–it remains a factor in Norwegian identity.

Before the actual secession in 1814, Norwegian separatism hardly seemed serious in the eyes of the Danes. This attitude found support in, among other things, the satirical comedy *Republikken paa Øen* (*The Island Republic*) published by the Norwegian poet J. Nordahl Brun in 1793. As one of the first members of the Norwegian society in Copenhagen in 1772, the young Brun had been suspected of disloyalty to the Danish king on account of his literary works praising ancient Norwegian independence. However, his 1793 play reflects a different attitude to popular self-government and individual freedom. The setting is a island republic where the elected leader feathers his own nest, while the mob continues all the bad habits from the previous regime at the cost of ordinary people who no longer have a monarch to protect them. Finally the unruly mob takes over the entire state, until the Danish king sends a couple of frigates and restores law and order.

Jens Baggesen: A Third Interpretation of Freedom

The young poet Jens Baggesen (1764-1826) was considered the most promising talent in Danish literature between 1785 and the breakthrough of romanticism in 1802. His dominant mood was one of not-belonging. A son of the proletariat, the young man through charm and intelligence secured himself the protection of the internationally minded Holstein aristocracy, and he developed into an entertainer much in demand with its baronesses and countesses. In his writings he tries to carry on Ewald's serious lyrical odes as well as Wessel's versified comical anecdotes; in 1789 he completed a masterful translation of Holberg's Latin novel from 1741 about Niels Kliim's journey to the underworld.

Baggesen's major work was, however, a first-person travel narrative à la Laurence Sterne, published under the title *Labyrinten* (*The Labyrinth*), I-II, 1792-3. It takes the reader from Copenhagen to Switzerland in Europe's fateful year 1789, but the promised two-volume continuation of the journey from Basle to Paris and back to Denmark in 1790 was only published posthumously in 1830-1 from diary entries and private

letters, edited by C.J. Boye. The young Baggesen was portrayed by C. Pram as a "curious, enthusiastic, melancholy, indescribable person".[598] Undoubtedly his personality was a far cry from the harmonious and mature character of a contemporary like Goethe.[599] In Paris Baggesen danced on the ruins of the Bastille to applause from passing Parisians, but it is uncertain whether this was a matter of political conviction or impulsive exhibitionism. In life as in his works, Baggesen was a riddle, probably also to himself.

In the chapter of his *Labyrinth* called "Herrmannsbierget" (Arminiusburg), he is at first on top of a German mountain where he launches into a regular Klopstockian ode in memory of the leader of the Cherusci, Herrmann, who defeated three Roman legions at this place in 9 CE, a topic dramatised by Klopstock as we saw earlier. By repeating the exotic names of native tribes participating in the battle he creates the effect of a tune that is answered by an echo from the valley saying that the losers' blood is that of tyrants, shed for the sake of sacred Germanic freedom. Reacting to this, Baggesen proclaims freedom to be sacred also to him, his brow glows and his heart beats loudly by the memory of this victory. This leads to a lengthy poetical celebration of German culture and civilisation, ranging from Herrmann and Charlemagne through Luther and Leibniz to Klopstock, Wieland and Schiller (Goethe is not included). Baggesen is convinced that the true idea of liberty came from the German woods, in contrast to Montesquieu's assertion in *The Spirit of the Laws* that all freedom in Europe stems from the English forests.

In the second half of the text the threatening clouds over the mountain top vanish, the sun breaks through in all its splendour, birds start to sing again, and all of a sudden Baggesen's mood changes from pro-German to cosmopolitan. He embraces in his mind all European nations because they are all equally needed in the European concert. Today patriotism is meaningless unless it is a reflection of civic virtue. As culture, enlightenment and general refinement of humanity increase, the feeling of belonging expands and one day the whole globe may be one large home for all humanity. Such thematic shifts are conducted throughout the book.

In the chapter "Frihed og de fire Elementer" (Liberty and the four elements), Baggesen ponders the idea of freedom. He finds freedom in

nature, represented by the four ancient simple elements of water, air, fire (sun) and earth (treetops), to be more beautiful than all castles, stages and museums of the world put together. A coach is transporting him and his two travelling-companions through a flooded Hessian landscape on an early summer morning with a heavy fog slowly lifting. Baggesen compares the view to Noah's experience when preparing to land his ark on Mount Ararat. Pleased at having escaped water-logged Mannheim, the small group of travellers remembers "what we so easily forget and yet should never fail to remember: that *humanity cannot live on freedom alone*, and that the simple elements of nature barely last a full summer morning and its intoxication." The rising sun makes the travellers think of how freedom is expanding in Europe like a comet with an ever-spreading tail that seems to conquer all skies. Baggesen protests that he prefers the sun to a comet and is no particular friend of tails. But, he asks, what is freedom? There is human freedom, and there is civic freedom, both are matters of independence. Civic freedom relies on independence of everything except the law, and human freedom on independence of everything except reason. A third type of freedom, Baggesen adds, is called political, but this is hard to conceive of in terms of independence, since a state cannot be entirely independent without coming to an end as a state, at least as a culture state. To Baggesen it seems confused first to demand political, then civic and finally human freedom. "Give me", he responds, " first free, that is, moral, people, then in a minute I shall have free, that is, law-abiding, people, and once these are everywhere, political freedom follows automatically and completes the picture in an equilateral triangle with three identical angles." The quasi-serious and pseudo-scientific tone is then abruptly–but typically for the book in general–drowned out by a joke. His two friends claim that in theory one may easily make two and two easily three, but they protest that in practice this operation will never do. One of them offers an illustration: the three travellers have only brought one umbrella along and none of them can produce two or three from one, whereas it is possible to reduce three hats to two and two to one, which he demonstrates by knocking the hats off the heads of his two companions. Baggesen then spontaneously knocks off the speaker's hat, thus ending the incident in bare-headed anarchy. "With some difficulty we located our hats on the ground and got down from the coach to retrieve them. And thus ended our debates on revolutions."[600] For Baggesen enthusiasm does not necessarily end in fanaticism, especially if balanced by humour.

Epilogue

Between Holberg and romanticism the concept of freedom does not form an important part in the building of a Danish national identity. The formula regarding personal freedom seems to imply subdued, often self-controlled individualism. Appreciation of individualism only penetrated this society with great difficulty as long as it was dominated by religion and patriotism, both supervised by an absolute monarch with old-fashioned paternalistic ideas of sternness but justice. Circumstances facilitating the flourishing of gifted and exceptional individuals were only to appear in the 1830s and 40s during the public and semipublic debate on democracy and participation of the people in the administration of the state. Even then there were limitations.

Advisory Assemblies of the Estates were introduced by decrees in 1831 and 1834 and operated from 1835, till they were substituted in 1848-9 by a democratic parliament (the *Rigsdag*). During the same years individual freedom became quite an issue. The young Jewish journalist and later prominent author M.A. Goldschmidt (1819-87) in 1840-6 edited a satirical periodical called *Corsaren* (*The Corsair*).[601] Its provocative motto ran: "Ça ira, ça ira!",[602] and from July 1842 the front page featured a woodcut of a pirate vessel in troubled waters, its two masts flying respectively the French tricolour and a death's head pennant. In the spirit of radical French-oriented liberalism Goldschmidt published scornful and witty articles written by himself and his supporters against absolutism as well as against restriction on freedom of speech. He ran into trial after trial–some won, some lost–which only attracted desirable public attention to his political messages. Legal confiscation of a number inevitably meant new subscribers.

A different kind of individualism with a national or at least Scandinavian background was introduced by N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872). His poem "Rim-Brev til Nordiske Paarørende" (Rhyme Letter to Nordic Relatives), printed as dedicatory text in his programmatic handbook *Nordens Mythologi* (*Norse Mythology*), 1832, has the often quoted line: "Freedom for *Loki* as well as for *Thor*" (in Danish: "Frihed for *Loke* saavelsom for *Thor*").[603] Loki is the entertaining and often too enterprising trickster among the pagan Norse gods who finally causes the death of Balder, god of innocence and goodness, and thus heralds the coming of the end of the world in a veritable doomsday battle, the *Ragnarok*.

Modern readers who are ignorant of Grundtvig's context invariably understand the line just quoted as an acceptance of a general dualism: good and evil are to enjoy the same conditions in earthly life. This is entirely wrong. Grundtvig does not work with a dichotomy from a stance of consistent relativism. As a Christian he would not dream of allowing room for what he considered evil. Death and Satan are intolerable enemies to human beings. Grundtvig assumes *three* powers. *Good* is represented by Thor with his magical hammer that may symbolise the spoken word (intelligence and strength combined). *Evil* is personified in the Jötuns (Giants) who are identified in purely materialist terms, devoid of culture and intellectual life, fond of eating, drinking, sex, fighting and other physical feats, all aimless. Loki however stands for a *third position.* He is by birth a Jötun, by choice a foster-brother of Odin, the father of the gods. Loki is an ambivalent character, handsome to look at but unreliable, though mostly mischievous rather than wicked. Normally he is accepted as an inhabitant of *Asgard,* the home town of the gods. Furthermore he serves as a crafty travelling-companion for Thor when visiting the earth, *Midgard,* or its dangerous outskirts, *Udgard.* Loki in Grundtvig's anthropology symbolises a hopeful category of the intelligent non-believer with eye and ear open for spiritual life (i.e., the Christian gospel and faith). He has the potential to be a true believer, but a conversion has not yet taken place. He can be persuaded to subdue his malicious side, and consequently he partakes in a "Freedom for everything deriving from spirit" (in Danish: "*Frihed* for alt hvad der stammer fra *Aand*").[604] In his book *Brage-Snak* (*Bragi's Talk*) from 1844, Grundtvig suggests that attempts to tie Loki's hands or even to seal his mouth lead only to suppression of free thought and free speech. Loki, problematic as he appears, is simply to Grundtvig "the mouthpiece of freedom of speech in each present moment", and his possible abuse of this right should by no means be prevented, since the normal and appropriate use of freedom of speech then is compromised and endangered.[605]

Grundtvig did not care much for the system of political parties which grew out of the Danish democratic constitution, *Danmarks Riges Grundlov* of 1849, because he felt that it divided the Danish people instead of uniting it.[606] As an elected parliamentarian 1848-58, Grundtvig held an everyday concept of freedom in very high esteem–in fact far above the idea of common equality from French revolutionary thinking–and he formulated it as a variation on the golden rule: you should allow your

neighbour the same freedom as you claim for yourself.[607] Grundtvig in effect became a founder of the peaceful consensus society of twentieth century Denmark, though his idea of human rights was significantly different from those of the years 1776, 1789, 1830 and 1848. After the disastrous military defeat of 1864, Denmark was one of the smallest but also most purely "national" states in Europe, with a homogeneous population all speaking the same language. Considered in the light of Denmark's long history, this was a unique situation, but to many Danes it eventually became natural and obvious. During the following century, Grundtvig's idea of a common Danish identity (in Danish *Folkelighed*) defined in terms of shared history, language and literature suited Danish culture and outlook on life perfectly. Grundtvig's views were taught and practised at his and his followers' folk high schools, a network of local centres for general education and promotion of active citizenship scattered across the country from 1844 onwards, at its peak numbering about one hundred institutions. His many national songs were made available in *Højskolesangbogen* (*Songbook for Folk High Schools*), 1894 (with numerous later reprints) and have become popular far beyond the originally intended audience.

The feeling of a national family circle was shaken by immigration of guest workers and refugees in the final decades of the twentieth century, and at the beginning of the twenty-first Grundtvig's ideas of freedom have rather unexpectedly been challenged by the establishment of a Muslim minority culture in the midst of Danish society. Time will show whether they are as needed as ever to uphold traditional Danish self-conception or have to be abolished in favour of precisely the kind of universal human rights that had such a hard time gaining ground in Denmark in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

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