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# CARL NIELSEN'S CULTURAL SELF-EDUCATION

His Early Engagement with Fine Art and Ideas and  
the Path towards *Hymnus Amoris*<sup>1</sup>

By Colin Roth

In recent decades we have been blessed with the publication of a great deal of contemporary material and documentation relating to Carl Nielsen's life and work as an adjunct to the publication of his music by the Carl Nielsen Edition. Though not quite complete at the time of writing, this resource, and the increasing availability on the internet of major biographical and bibliographical materials, has highlighted the absence in our knowledge of Carl Nielsen of anything much from his formative years in Copenhagen, between his arrival there from Odense in 1886 and the point after his graduation from the Conservatoire when he began forming relationships and then travelling around Europe. Nielsen makes a few remarks about his early musical experiences in *Min fynske barndom*,<sup>2</sup> but gives very little clue about his formal education, either in music or in any of the other spheres of cultural life.

This article therefore attempts to see, by studying the early letters, diaries and other documents, whether we can get a clearer idea of Nielsen's educational progress and the development of his ideas and enthusiasms, to help us to understand how such a rich and complex intellect developed in a man with such humble beginnings. Only tantalising glimpses remain of Nielsen's early musical development, for example in his comments in letters on meetings with N.W. Gade, Johannes Brahms, and some of the concerts and operas he attended on his travels. This frustrating absence of musical background can be addressed by examining the way Nielsen learned

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1 I would like to thank Paolo Muntoni, Mikkel Vad, Jens Boeg, Ulrik Skat Sørensen and Raymond Knapp for their stimulating contributions to the November 2011 Copenhagen conference, 'Carl Nielsen, Inheritance and Legacy', from which some ideas are now reflected here. I am very grateful to Eskil Irminger for his help in checking the translations, which are mine unless otherwise attributed, and for his contribution to my understanding of the material and its context. He is, of course, not responsible for any errors which remain.

2 Carl Nielsen, *Min fynske Barndom*, Copenhagen 1927.

about art and ideas, steadily developing his own views, and through study of his learning process, we can achieve a deeper understanding of his musical pathway, his 'bildung'.<sup>3</sup> Except in looking forward to the publication of *Hymnus Amoris* in 1898, the article goes no further than December 1897, the end date of the first volume of Carl Nielsen's letters, and there is virtually no discussion of two of the composer's most important friendships with artists, those with Jens Frederik Willumsen and Vilhelm Hammershøi which began during these early years, as both invite much fuller consideration than is possible here.<sup>4</sup>

The first signals we have from the documents available suggest that Carl Nielsen's teachers at the Conservatoire may have been instrumental in encouraging him to seek out a wider cultural experience rather than a tightly musical one. In January 1889 Nielsen is telling his girlfriend, Emilie Demant Hansen, about a visit to the apartment of his professor, N.W. Gade, at 9-11 Vestervold:

Yesterday I was up at Professor Gade's. He was eating lunch when I arrived so I had the opportunity to look around his room; a proper artist's apartment with reproductions of Raphael's and Rembrandt's works and drawings and sketches by both the famous dead and still living artists...Then we talked about music and art for a long time and you can believe that it was very interesting.<sup>5</sup>

Towards the end of the same letter he addresses himself to Emilie about her piano playing:

Seek to think about what feeling can have moved Beethoven and Mozart when you play one of their sonatas, and notice how the themes come again, sometimes in small stumps and sometimes in magnified shape; that will develop your musical sense to a high degree. Look also at the overall building of the piece of music, that is often clearly architectonic [in] art works and you will be as happy as a baby, when you *yourself* have found something which you hitherto had not noticed. I underline "yourself" because one always has

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3 Peter Watson, *The German Genius*, New York 2012, 65-90.

4 The tiny remaining documentary record of the friendship between Nielsen and the Hammershøis may be found in Colin Roth, 'Carl Nielsen and the Danish Tradition of Story-Telling' in *Carl Nielsen Studies* 4 (2009), 168-171.

5 *Jeg var igaar oppe hos Gade. Han spiste Frokost da jeg kom og jeg fik altsaa Lejlighed til at se mig om i hans Værelse; et rigtigt Kunstnergemak med Gjengivelser af Rafaels og Rembrandts Værker og Tegninger og Skitser af berømte døde og nulevende Kunstnere [...] Saa talte vi om Musik og Kunst i lang Tid og Du kan tro det var interessant.* John Fellow (ed.), *Carl Nielsen Brevudgaven* (CNB), Copenhagen 2005, vol. 1, 75-78, letter 16 (17.1.1889) to Emilie Demant Hansen.

greater happiness of that which one discovers without help than that which another draws attention to.<sup>6</sup>

Later that year, he explained to Emilie that, 'I have recently begun to subscribe to a big book in three volumes on the great French Revolution of 1789. It's really interesting and, if you would like it when it has all come, that's fine with me. There are illustrations and many portraits of the revolution's men. Marat looks disgustingly bloodthirsty and he bears out the thought that one can pretty much see in a person what they're capable of being. Now I have just about got the finale to the Suite finished...'<sup>7</sup>

Orla Rosenhoff seems to have had a greater influence on Nielsen's development than Professor Gade, and it is clear from their correspondence that Nielsen had a less formal relationship with him than with the older man. In July 1890, not long before leaving on a long study tour of the major European cities financed by the Ancherske Legat, Nielsen wrote to Rosenhoff:

I felt, the last time I was at your place, how much I owe to you, and I must one day – just once – have permission to say to you that I am amazed at the way you take art on. You never yield, never a bar that says nothing, not a thought that is not either thought through or felt. And if you knew how big and good your personal influence is, how the whole of your artistic opinions are infectious and inspiring, then it cannot surprise you that I want permission to tell you what I think this one time. When I have been at your place, I always have a clear and distinct feeling that I can achieve great things in the world. And it

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6 *Søg at tænke over, hvad Stemning der kan have bevæget Beethoven og Mozart naar Du spiller en af deres Sonater og læg Mærke til hvorledes Themaerne kommer igjen, snart i smaa Stumper og snart i forstørret Skikkelse; det vil udvikle Din musikalske Sans i høj Grad. Se ogsaa paa hele Bygningen af et Musikstykke, det er ofte rene arkitektoniske Kunstværker og Du vil glæde Dig som et Barn, hvergang Du selv har fundet noget som Du hidtil [ikke] har lagt Mærke til. Jeg understreger 'selv' fordi at man har altid større Glæde af det man opdager ved egen Hjælp end naar en anden gjør opmærksom derpaa.,* *ibid.*, vol. 1, 75-78, letter 16 (17.1.1889) to Emilie Demant Hansen.

7 *Jeg har i disse Dage begyndt at abonnere paa en stor Bog i tre Bind om den store franske Revolution 1789. Den er uhyre interessant og, hvis Du vil have den naar den er helt færdig, saa sig mig det. Der er Illustrationer i og mange Portraitter af Revolutionens Mænd. Marat ser modbydelig blodtørstig ud og han bekræfter den Mening at man omtrent kan se paa et Menneske, hvad han indeholder. Nu har jeg omtrent faaet Finalen til Suiten færdig.* *CNB*, vol. 1, 86, letter 21 (15.4.1889) to Emilie Demant Hansen. Eskil Irminger suggests that Nielsen may have seen the portrait by Joseph Boze, and explains that the subscription volumes will have arrived separately over a period, so Nielsen is offering to hand over the set when it is complete.

is strange that this feeling is almost strongest when you do not like my things; so it is not because you praise, but only the inspiring way you take things on, which awakes energy.<sup>8</sup>

Nielsen's diary of the trip to Dresden, Berlin, Leipzig and then Paris, Milan, Florence, Rome and Venice, between September 1890 and June 1891, is full of descriptions of the pictures and sculpture he saw, and records his feelings about them. Quite often he seems to have seen etchings and drawings in the galleries, rather than the oil paintings we might expect to see nowadays,<sup>9</sup> but the churches were full of major works in oil and marble. He responds strongly and positively to the work of Rembrandt and Dürer and some Dutch artists, but doesn't much care for Hans Holbein ('I don't understand him. I can see that it is extraordinarily fine and beautiful, but I don't think it is 'great' art'<sup>10</sup>) At this stage he is impressed by Rubens: 'In the gallery this morning. The same shivers every time I see Rubens' "Head and shoulder portrait of a dark blond young man". I would not be at all surprised if he spoke to me; but fear that his voice would have a strange, ghostly ring, sorrowful, ghostly, as though from a soul that cannot get rest, even after death. Strange picture!'<sup>11</sup> His sharpest comments are reserved for an opera, a performance in Leipzig of Meyerbeer's *Robert the Devil*: 'I cannot find words that are strong enough to condemn this wretched bastard of an opera. It is a scandal that such a mess is still being performed on all of Europe's leading stages in our times. If Meyerbeer was still alive I would travel to him and spit in

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- 8 *Jeg følte sidst jeg var hos Dem, hvormeget jeg skylder Dem, og jeg maa engang – en eneste blot – have Lov til at sige Dem, at jeg beundrer den Maade, De tager Kunsten paa. Aldrig giver De efter, aldrig en Takt som intet siger, ikke en Tanke som ikke er tænkt og følt. Og naar De saa vidste hvor stor og god Deres personlige Indflydelse er, hvordan hele Deres Kunstanskuelse er smittende og befrugtende, saa kan det ikke undre Dem, at jeg vil have Lov til at sige Dem min Mening en Gang. Naar jeg har været hos Dem, har jeg altid en klar og tydelig Følelse af, at jeg kan udrette store Ting i Verden. Og det er mærkeligt, den Følelse er næsten stærkest, naar De ikke har syntes om mine Ting; altsaa er det ikke fordi De roser, men alene den inspirerende Maade De tager Tingene paa, som vækker Energien., CNB, vol. 1, 105, letter 38 (11.7.1890) to Orla Rosenhoff.*
- 9 Gallery practice has changed in the last century, and for some time now there have been too many visitors to galleries for the old way of letting them sit at tables with folders of precious works on paper to have continued. Displays are now safely nailed to the walls where untrained or dirty fingers can't harm them.
- 10 *Hans Holbein forstaar jeg ikke. Jeg kan godt se, at det er overordenlig fint og kjønt; men jeg synes ikke det er den 'store' Kunst., CNB, vol. 1, 119, letter 60 (15.9.1890) to Emil B. Sachs.*
- 11 *I Galleriet i Formiddags. Denne samme Gysen hvergang jeg ser Rubens: "Brustbild eines dunkelblonden jungen Mannes". Jeg vilde slet ikke blive forbauset om han talte til mig; men bange, – thi hans Stemme vilde have en forunderlig, spøgelsesagtig Klang; klagende, spøgelsesagtig, som fra en Sjæl der aldrig kan faa Ro, selv ikke efter Døden. Forunderligt Billede!, CNB, vol. 1, 124, diary entry 75 (30.9.1890).*

his face.<sup>12</sup> So it's no surprise that he had written to Orla Rosenhoff from Berlin a few months earlier, "There are still thousands of other things which I would like to write about, for example, what I have seen of painting and sculpture, which it is my greatest happiness to study (yes, with shame to say, I'd rather go into and from [gallery] collections than the opera) and of myself as a person, individually; but it is no use, and some time it must have an end."<sup>13</sup>

Nielsen had two guides as he travelled through the galleries of Europe, Emil B. Sachs<sup>14</sup> and Hans Nicolaj Hansen.<sup>15</sup> His letters to them, and diary records of shared experiences, show us his increasing sophistication, both in terms of range of interest and his capacity to speak connoisseurship's language. He wrote to Sachs on 30 October 1890, "The old painters suffer more than the modern from being reproduced in photogravures and woodcuts, I think; perhaps that is because their spiritual content is somewhat foreign to us; they are not our feelings and thoughts that the pictures are an expression of, not our ideal which is portrayed; but the way in which it is done is, I think, exactly the same."<sup>16</sup> It is evident that although he's primarily interested in experiencing the works of 'old masters' here in Berlin, he has not forgotten the work of his own contemporaries. His letter to Sachs continues, "Naturally I talk here only about the good masters. Incidentally, can one think of any painter more modern than Frans Hals, for example? I have just now seen his "Witch" and a couple of portraits here in the gallery in the last few days. And Rembrandt must not be forgotten! He is and remains the first of all for me; he and ... Krøyer, our own Krøyer! –".<sup>17</sup>

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12 *Jeg kan ikke finde Ord der ere stærke nok til Fordømmelsen af det elendige Misfoster af en Opera. Det er en Skandale at man i vor Tid opfører et saadant Makværk paa alle Europas første Scener. Ifald Meyerbeer levede vilde jeg rejse til ham og spytte ham i Ansigtet.*, CNB, vol 1, 193, diary entry 217 (1.2.1891).

13 *Der var endnu Tusinde andre Ting som jeg havde Lyst til at skrive om, f.Eks. hvad jeg har set af Malerkunst og Skulptur, som det er min største Glæde at studere (Ja med Skam at sige, jeg gaar hellere i og fra Samlingen end i Operaen) og om mig selv som Menneske, Individ; men det kan jo ikke nytte, engang maa det have Ende.*, CNB, vol. 1, 157, letter 139 (24.11.1890) to Orla Rosenhoff from Berlin.

14 Emil Bertel Sachs, 16.2.1855-31.7.1920, pedagogue and philanthropist. Biographical information is available from the on-line publication, *Den Store Danske* ([www.denstoredanske.dk](http://www.denstoredanske.dk))

15 Hans Nikolaj Hansen, 15.5.1853-14.3.1923, painter, etcher. See [www.denstoredanske.dk](http://www.denstoredanske.dk).

16 *De gamle Malere taaler mindre end de moderne at gjengives i Fotograveures og Træsnit, synes jeg; maaske har det sin Grund deri, at deres aandelige Indhold er os noget fremmed; det er ikke vore Følelser og Tanker de Billeder ere et Udslag af, ikke vort Ideal som bliver fremstillet; men Maaden det er gjort paa synes jeg er akkurat den samme.*, CNB, vol. 1, 139, letter 109 (30.10.1890) to Emil B. Sachs from Berlin.

17 *Naturligvis taler jeg her kun om de gode Mestre. Forresten! Kan man tænke sig nogen Maler mere moderne end Frans Hals f:Expl? Jeg har netop lige set hans 'Hex' og et par Portraitter her Galleriet i disse Dage. Og Rembrandt ikke at forglemme! Han er og bliver den første af alle for mig; han og ... Krøyer, vor egen Krøyer! –*, *Ibid.*, 138, letter 109 (30.10.1890) to Emil B. Sachs from Berlin.

That this was a teaching relationship rather than a simple friendship (Sachs, like Hansen, was about a decade older than Nielsen) is clear from a letter to Sachs of 23 November 1890: 'You are right about Raphael, and now I think we have understood each other. But there are still lovely things up there in the collection! – I have many times had the satisfaction of falling into ecstasy over another picture which I had not noticed until then, and then looked it up in the catalogue and got confirmation that I was on the right path. So it was last Wednesday with a picture by Pieter de Hooch: "One of the loveliest works of the Dutch genre painters". Well done!' <sup>18</sup> But the pedagogic stride of their friendship was not one way: that Christmas Nielsen sent Sachs a small gift: 'You have hopefully received a little Christmas gift from me; which I sent already several days ago. It can maybe interest you that there is something wholly new in the photograph; [it is made] without retouching and without artificial light. The man is a South American, a Doctor, and is the first who has raised photography up to be an art. I saw a great number of his pictures from the same publisher which were pure art works and I was amazed by what he had achieved.' <sup>19</sup>

Where connoisseurship (what is sometimes rather snobbily put down as 'art appreciation') has always been an accepted and legitimate route to understanding, and even more importantly a necessary basis for the market in which art maintains monetary value and artists can make a living, musical appreciation has rarely been accorded the same status. The piano's increasingly industrial production and relative affordability since the late eighteenth century allowed practical music-making to establish itself as a primary pastime for the middle and upper classes, and with it a strong and stable market for professional musicians as teachers and providers of music to be played. Although drawing and painting continued to attract amateur participation, music's theatricality, its capacity to fill time and capture the attention, and perhaps the approval, of a social gathering, led to a difference between the arts in the way amateurs set about establishing their credentials as 'experts'. Whereas in painting and drawing (and for that matter in literature) being able to

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18 *Du har ret med Hensyn til Raphael, og nu tror jeg vi har forstaaet hinanden. Men hvor der dog henrivende Ting deroppe i Samlingen! – Jeg har flere Gange havt den Tilfredsstillelse at falde i Henrykkelse over et eller andet Billede som jeg forhen ikke havde bemærket og saa slaaet op i Cataloget og faaet Bekræftelse paa at jeg var paa rigtig Vej. Saaledes i Onsdags med et Billede af Pieter de Hooch: 'Eines der schönsten Werke der Holländischen Genremalerei'. Det gør saa godt!* CNB, vol. 1, 152, letter 137 (23.11.1890) to Emil B. Sachs.

19 *Du har forhaabentlig modtaget en lille Julegave fra mig; som jeg sendte allerede for mange Dage siden. Det kan maaske interessere Dig at det er Noget helt Nyt i Fotografien; uden Retouche og uden kunstigt Lys. Manden er Sydamerikaner, Doktor, og er den første som har hævet Fotografien op til Kunst. Jeg saa en stor Dæl Billeder paa samme Forlag af ham som vare rene Kunstværker og jeg var forbauset over hvad han har præsteret.* CNB vol. 1, 178, letter 178 (27.12.1890) to Emil B. Sachs.

talk knowledgeably and engagingly about the subject was sufficient mark of an individual's competence, in music that status came primarily from competence as a performer. The consequence for music education, as compared to both art and literature, is that it was normal for musicians to believe that a command of music notation and a certain level of practical engagement is necessary for connoisseurship and understanding, where as no such practical demand is made of the connoisseur of art or literature. So where Nielsen and his two guides on this educational journey around Europe clearly believe that looking, thinking and talking about art is a good basis for the composer's aesthetic development, when Nielsen was asked by his artist friend Jens Frederik Willumsen about developing his understanding of music in December 1892, Nielsen's response was to send a book which we have to suppose he had been introduced to at the Conservatoire, and which uses a determinedly scientific approach and a good deal of music-theoretical language to tell musicians what they're really doing.<sup>20</sup> Nielsen wrote, 'At the same time I'm sending you a little book in Danish by the English philosopher Herbert Spencer, "Music's Origin and Function"... Of music counts it stronger than in any other art, that one must learn the academic [foundations]; but on the other hand, one can discard what one has learned quicker than in the other arts, or more correctly, it is quite necessary, if one has anything one wants said – something personal – but few are strong enough to liberate themselves.<sup>21</sup> But Willumsen wrote, two months later: 'I haven't begun to study music theory yet, I am becoming more and more engaged in my work at the atelier...'<sup>22</sup>

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20 'If music, taking for its raw material the various modifications of voice which are the physiological results of excited feeling, intensifies, combines, and complicates them – if it exaggerates the loudness, the resonance, the pitch, the intervals, and the variability, which, in virtue of an organic law, are the characteristics of passionate speech – if, by carrying out these further, more consistently, more unitedly, and more sustainedly, it produces an idealized language of emotion; then its power over us becomes comprehensible. But in the absence of this theory the expressiveness of music appears inexplicable.' Herbert Spencer, 'The Origin and Function of Music', in *Essays: Scientific, Political and Speculative*, vol. 2, 1857/1891, 10/26. Accessed from <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/336/12353> on 22.4.2011.

21 *Med det samme sender jeg Dem en lille Bog paa Dansk af den engelske Filosof Herbert Spencer: 'Musiken[s] Vorden og Virken' [...] Om Musiken gjælder det stærkere end i nogen anden Kunst, at man maa lære det Akademiske; men til Gjengæld kan man saa smide det Lærte bort hurtigere end i de andre Kunster, eller rettere, det er aldeles nødvendigt, hvis man da har Noget man skal have sagt; – Noget personligt –; men faa er stærke nok til at frigjøre sig.* CNB vol. 1, 276, letter 359 (27.12.1892) to J.F. Willumsen, Paris.

22 *Endnu er jeg ikke begyndt at studere Musikteorien, jeg er efterhaanden kommen svært ind i mit Arbejde paa Atelieret [...]* CNB vol. 1, 284-285, letter 381 (8.2.1893) J.F. Willumsen to CN and AMCN.

After meeting Sachs in Berlin on 25 February 1891,<sup>23</sup> Nielsen travelled to Paris through Cologne on the 26th, and met the composer E.S. (Fritz) Bendix and Hans Nicolaj Hansen in a café there on the 27th.<sup>24</sup> Nielsen writes in his diary that Hansen ‘...spoke interestingly about the modern French paintings and struggles there at the moment.’<sup>25</sup> They met at the Louvre on the 28th: ‘Later in the Louvre with Hans. N. Hansen who showed me round the Museum. Leonardo’s pictures made a strong impression and when I saw the picture which shows two women with one on the other’s lap and a little child by the side, it ran cold down my back. The collections in Berlin and Dresden bear no comparison with the Louvre.’<sup>26</sup>

From the diary entry of the next day, 1 March, it seems that Sachs had travelled to Paris with Nielsen, as the composer writes, ‘In the Luxembourg, Pantheon, School of Fine Arts with Hans Nicolai [Hansen] and Emil S. where we saw good art, both older and completely modern’,<sup>27</sup> and they were together again the next day: ‘Were in the Louvre Department Store to look at the splendid bustle on the first day of the Spring season. In the evening at [Fritz] Bendix’s for company where I amused myself well. Miss Brodersen is quite pretty, really.’<sup>28</sup> In fact, though Sach’s name isn’t mentioned again, the rest of the group seem to have spent a great deal of the next month in the galleries – until and after Nielsen and Anne-Marie Brodersen married on 10 April. That the month was by no means lost to passion (the birth of Irmelin on 9 December the same year shows that passion certainly played a part) is evident from this note in Nielsen’s diary on 10 March: ‘With Hans Nicolai [Hansen] and Clement in the Zoological Garden. Saw a stone pine for the first time and came to think about J.P. Jacobsen. What mysticism over a stone pine facing a dark blue sky! [...] Read some

23 *I Galleriet med Emil S[achs]*. CNB vol. 1, 209, diary entry 242 (25.2.1891), Berlin.

24 CN writes, *I Cafe de la Regence, hvor vi traf Hans Nicolai Hansen og Nordmanden Maurer*. CNB vol. 1, 210, diary entry 243 (26.2.1891), Paris. The meeting may have been accidental: Hansen was living in Paris in order to work under the French artist Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898).

25 [...] *fortalte interessant om den modern franske Malerkunst og Brydningerne der i Øjeblikket*. CNB vol. 1, 210, diary entry 244 (27.2.1891), Paris.

26 *Senere i Louvre med Hans N. Hansen som viste mig rundt i Musèet. Leonardos Billeder gjorde et stort Indtryk og da jeg så det Billede som forestiller to Kvinder med hinanden paa Skjødet og et lille Barn ved Siden af, løb det mig koldt ned af Ryggen. Samlingerne i Berlin og Dresden taaler ingen Sammenligning med Louvre*. CNB vol. 1, 210, diary entry 245 (28.2.1891).

27 *I Luxembourg, Pantheon, Ecole des beaux arts med Hans Nicolai [Hansen] og Emil S. hvor vi saa god Kunst, baade ældre og helt moderne*. CNB vol. 1, 212, diary entry 247 (1.3.1891).

28 *Var i Magasin du Louvre for [at] se paa det storartede Liv paa den første Dag i Foraarssaison. Om Aftenen hos [Fritz] Bendix til Selskab hvor jeg morede mig godt. Frøken Brodersen er egentlig meget Kjøn*. CNB vol. 1, 212, diary entry 248 (2.3.1891).



of Svend Grundtvig's Folk Songs and was in rapture over the delightful poetry that remains in these naive old Danish songs.–<sup>29</sup>

What were the ideas about art that prevailed in Danish culture during the 19th century? Did the people who liked and bought art have different ideas to the people who made and sold it? Have we any record of whether, and how, those ideas became familiar to Carl Nielsen before his marriage to the sculptress, Anne-Marie Brodersen, and whether his ideas changed later?

There isn't room to fully address these important questions in this article, but one way of beginning to answer them is to look at the training of Nielsen's companion and guide in Paris, Hans Nicolaj Hansen. An artist of distinct quality and considerable range, Hansen was born in Copenhagen in 1853, the same year that Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg died. Hansen trained at the Royal Academy of Art which Eckersberg had dominated in the years since becoming a Professor in 1818; so although not taught by the master himself, Hansen received his training in painting from Eckersberg's pupils and according to his principles, which may help to explain why he left the Academy in 1877 and took himself off to Paris in 1878 to work at the studio of Leon Bonnat, as Peder Severin Krøyer and Lauritz Tuxen had done before him.

Though Eckersberg was by no means the first artist to do so,<sup>30</sup> his decision to take his paints and canvas outdoors, and to work on a portable easel in front of his subject,<sup>31</sup> had huge importance for Danish painting because Eckersberg made observation of the real in natural light a cornerstone of his practice, and once teaching it became his firm requirement of his pupils. Himself a student of the Academy in the

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29 *Med Hans Nicolai [Hansen] og Clement i zoologisk Have. Saa for første Gang en Pinie og kom til at tænke paa J.P. Jacobsen. Hvilken Mystik over en Pinie mod en mørkeblaa Himmell – [...] Læste nogle af Svend Grundtvigs Folkeviser og henrykkes over den dejlige Poesi der hviler over disse naive, gamle danske Viser. –* . CNB vol. 1, 216, diary entry 257 (10.3.1891). Svend Grundtvig (1824-1883) was the second son of N.F. S. Grundtvig (1783-1872), whose ideas and political activity made a hugely significant contribution to his own and modern Danish culture. His ideas have been made more readily accessible to the English reader in an anthology of his writings, *The School for Life, N.F.S. Grundtvig on Education for the People*, trans. and ed. Edward Broadbridge with Clay Warren and Uffe Jonas (eds.), Aarhus, 2011.

30 Joseph Wright of Derby was amongst the earliest when, in 1774, he painted an impression of a partial eruption of Vesuvius 'from the life'; Wright continued to work outdoors on his return to England from Italy, and his practice was adopted by the younger generation of landscape artists before the turn of the century. See Benedict Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby, Painter of Light*, London 1968, 64 & 76.

31 On 9 May 1814, Eckersberg recorded in his diary the cost of the portable equipment required to paint outdoors: '11p. 8b. for et Farveskrin til at bære med Vadsketruer – og et nyt Jern til en Feldstol (12b.) og to smaae Blindrammer (2p.)'. *C.W. Eckersbergs dagbøger*, ed. V. Villadsen, Copenhagen 2009, 98.

days of Abildgaard,<sup>32</sup> Eckersberg had travelled to Paris in 1810, where he eventually trained and worked in the studio of the neo-classicist, Jacques-Louis David.<sup>33</sup> He went on, as contemporary ideas of a full artistic education required, to Rome in 1813, where he found Bertel Thorvaldsen firmly established, but still willing to provide mentoring and support to a fellow artist and countryman. It was the portrait Eckersberg painted of Thorvaldsen in Rome in 1814, and then on the older man's insistence sent home for exhibition, that first established his standing as an artist of great skill and importance. Eckersberg returned to Copenhagen in 1816, to commissions for history paintings from the King and, as his reputation increased, a steady flow of orders for portraits. His professorial appointment followed as soon as he had qualified for membership of the Royal Academy by the presentation of a suitable 'reception work'. Once established as a teacher, he managed to reform some of the Academy's outdated practice, for example by insisting that life drawing and painting for the senior students should be illuminated by natural light, but he was unsuccessful in persuading the authorities to reform the Academy's formal teaching practice.<sup>34</sup> So he supplemented the 'official' teaching there by inviting the best of his older students to private lessons in his apartment and workshop in Christiansborg (his entitlement as a professor at the Academy).<sup>35</sup>

Eckersberg's teaching was firmly rooted in practical instruction and guidance, with an expectation that his students would study his own work, for example the architectural sketches and landscapes not exhibited publicly but hung in his Christiansborg apartment. The theoretical contribution to young artists' education came from Niels Lauritz Høyen, who was appointed Professor of Art History at the Academy in 1829, particularly through the evening meetings he organised with young artists from 1830, where questions of aesthetics and history could be discussed.<sup>36</sup>

Hans Nicolaj Hansen's works clearly show the chiming of his Eckersbergian training in Denmark with French realism, exemplified in the work of Courbet in Hansen's day, from which Eckersberg's practice had developed. The author of his entry in *Den Store Danske* suggests that Hansen's 'sentimental realism is something new in Danish art', but in doing so fails to recognize the continuing dialogue between Danish and French figurative schools, and their distinctively idealising attribution of symbolic significance to representations of 'reality'. At the time Nielsen

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32 Danish artist, 1743-1809.

33 See A. Schnapper and A. Sérullaz, *Jacques-Louis David 1748-1825*, Paris 1989.

34 The proposal by Eckersberg and his colleague, Johan Ludvig Lund, was rejected in 1822. P.M. Hornung and Kasper Monrad, *C.W. Eckersberg, dansk malerkunsts fader*, Copenhagen 2005, 220.

35 *Ibid.*, 82-172 and 217-225.

36 *Ibid.*, 222-224.

bumped into him in Paris, Hansen was best known as an illustrator, having recently collaborated on *Ude og Hjemme*, part of Svend Grundtvig's project to publish old Danish literature. Hansen belonged to a progressive literary circle which included the brothers Brandes, Harald Høffding and J.P. Jacobsen, so it may have been through him that Nielsen would establish his friendship with Edvard and Georg Brandes.

This combination of close attention to reality with the search for an idealised image of that 'truth' embodies a paradox which is particularly strongly apparent in David's idealised 'neo-classical' portraits of Napoleon as well as underlying Eckersberg's work. The virtuosic practical mimetic skills of both artists are underpinned with ideas that may have been unvoiced, but stem inescapably from Plato's aesthetics. Plato's view was that the physicality of a real object diminished its capacity to be beautiful. He argued that beauty actually emanated from the 'ideal' which lay beyond reality, in a state of perfection of which a physical object was merely an imperfect specimen. This idea led to the view that the nearer art approached to intangibility, the closer it came to embodying the ideal. The misunderstanding of neo-classicism is deeply rooted in writing about late-eighteenth and nineteenth century cultural artefacts; they are represented as suppressing and hiding emotion in a way that, it is said, makes them 'anti-Romantic', whereas in fact they are made as they are in the belief that idealising reality, looking beyond the ordinary to the spiritual or inner feeling, heightens their emotional strength.<sup>37</sup> Mainstream 'Romanticism' by contrast asserts that it is the physical object or material produced by the artist, their perception and experience embodied, rather than the object they have experienced or an ideal beyond it, that is 'the work of art'. The Platonic idealism we are tracking is, though, an aspect of 'Romanticism', not antipathetic to it, because in reality (and despite the perception of those making it) what we the audience (including their contemporaries) were looking at and experiencing was the making artist's embodiment of their own point of view, a representation in this instance of an ideal state; it is also a reliable signal of the persistent interrelationship between Danish and French cultural practices in the period.<sup>38</sup>

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37 As David Jackson remarked in his paper on 'Hammershøi and Malevich' at the conference on 'Krøyer and Hammershøi viewed from abroad' hosted by Statens Museum for Kunst and the Hirschsprungske Samling in Copenhagen on 22.3.2012, the most important issue in examining a work of art is to recognise the meaning its artist is aiming to express, not its superficial appearance or stylistic resemblance to the work of other artists.

38 For example, August Bournonville (1805-1879) trained under Vestris in Paris between 1824-1830. His life-work clearly embodies this characteristic mix of careful attention to realistic detail drawn 'from the life' (as in *Napoli*, 1842) and the idealising spirit evident in the work he brought home from Paris in 1836, *Sylfiden*. See Colin Roth, 'Bournonville: some untold stories' in *Fund og Forskning*, 46, Copenhagen 2007, 154-157.

Søren Kierkegaard published a quite astonishing quantity of writing between 1837, when his first work appeared, and his death in 1855.<sup>39</sup> While his primary focus in his mature works is on religious subjects, his earlier works often address literary and cultural issues as he develops his 'point of view': that an individual's personal path towards 'salvation' is forged through meticulous self-examination and reflection upon experience. This progression from the 'real' to the 'spiritual' makes precisely the same manoeuvre as Eckersberg's practice, finding ideal beauty within and through the careful study of reality.

In the first volume of what remains his best known work, *Enten/eller, et livs-fragment (Either/Or, a fragment of life)*, published in 1843, Kierkegaard addresses the aesthetic value of music in relation to that of literature in a section entitled, 'The Immediate Erotic Stages or The Musical-Erotic'.

If I imagined two kingdoms bordering each other, one of which I knew rather well and the other not at all, and if however much I desired it I was not allowed to enter the unknown kingdom, I would still be able to form some idea of it. I would go to the border of the kingdom known to me and follow it all the way, and in doing so I would by my movements describe the outline of that unknown land and thus have a general idea of it, although I had never set foot in it...And even though I feel that music is an art that requires considerable experience if one is really to have an opinion on it, I comfort myself again as so often before with the paradox that also in presentiment and ignorance one can have a kind of experience.<sup>40</sup>

Kierkegaard has already excused himself for not being expert: in the previous paragraph he had said, 'Whether I am capable of saying anything adequate about [music] is another question. I am well aware that I do not understand music; I readily admit that I am a layman.' Echoing the point made earlier about perceptions of what it was to be a competent connoisseur of music, he says, 'I do not hide the fact that I do not belong to the chosen tribe of music experts, that at most I stand in the doorway as a gentile convert drawn from afar to this place by a strange, irresistible impulse – but no further. Yet it is possible that the little I have to say, if received with kindness and indulgence, may have a single comment that will be found to contain something true, even if it is concealed under a peasant's coat.'<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See Colin Roth, 'Speaking of Irony: Bournonville, Kierkegaard, H.C. Andersen and the Heibergs' in *Fund og Forskning*, 50, Copenhagen 2011, 345-370.

<sup>40</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. H. and E. Hong, Princeton 1987, 66.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

Continuing his metaphorical journey, Kierkegaard writes, 'The kingdom that I know, to whose outermost boundary I shall go to discover music, is language. If the various media are ordered according to a specific process of development, language and music must be placed closest to each other, and that is also why it has been said that music is a language, which is more than a clever observation. If one is inclined to indulge in cleverness, one could say that sculpture and painting, too, are each a kind of language, inasmuch as every expression of an idea is always a language, since the essence of the idea is language.'

Kierkegaard differentiates between the disciplines, suggesting that the parallel between spoken language and music is close because both depend, for their intelligibility, on limited attention to the physical activities that generate them: 'If a person spoke in such a way that we heard the flapping of his tongue etc., he would be speaking poorly; if he heard in such a way that he heard the vibrations of the air instead of words, he would be hearing poorly; if he read a book in such a way that he continually saw each individual letter, he would be reading poorly. Language is the perfect medium precisely when everything sensuous in it is negated. That is also the case with music; that which is really supposed to be heard is continually disengaging itself from the sensuous.' So, he argues, language and music are unlike sculpture and painting: 'In language, the sensuous as medium is reduced to a mere instrument and is continually negated. That is not the case with the other media. Neither in sculpture nor in painting is the sensuous a mere instrument; it is rather a component ... It would be a strangely backward consideration of a piece of sculpture or of a painting if I were to behold it in such a way that I took pains to see it independently of the sensuous, whereby I would completely cancel its beauty. In sculpture, architecture and painting, the idea is integral to the medium, but the fact that the idea does not reduce the medium to a mere instrument, does not continually negate it, expresses as it were, that this medium cannot speak. It is the same with nature. Therefore it is properly said that nature is dumb, and architecture and sculpture and painting; it is properly said despite all the fine, sensitive ears that can hear them speak.' He continues, 'It has already been pointed out that music as a medium does not rank as high as language, and that is why I said that music, understood in a certain way, is a language.'

'Language addresses itself to the ear. No other medium does this. The ear, in turn, is the most spiritually qualified sense...There is much in nature that is addressed to the ear, but what affects the ear is the purely sensate; therefore nature is mute, and it is a ludicrous fancy that one hears something because one hears a cow bellow or, what is perhaps more pretentious, a nightingale warble; it is a fancy that one hears something, a fancy that the one is worth more than the other, since it is all six of one and a half dozen of the other.'

'Language has its element in time; all other media have space as their element. Only music also occurs in time. But its occurrence in time is in turn a negation of the feelings dependent on the senses [*det Sandselige*<sup>42</sup>]. That which the other arts produce suggests their sensuousness precisely by having its continuance in space ... Music does not exist except in the moment it is performed, for even if a person can read notes ever so well and has an ever so vivid imagination, he still cannot deny that only in a figurative sense does music exist when it is being read. It actually exists only when it is being performed. That might seem an imperfection in this art in comparison with the other arts whose works continually exist because they have their continuance in the sensuous. But this is not so. It is indeed a demonstration that it is a higher, a more spiritual art.'

Now this is a lot of Kierkegaard, and a lot of aesthetics, to include in an article about Carl Nielsen. But it's important to show the context and argument from which Carl Nielsen appears to have drawn what is probably his most quoted description of his own music, of the energy which drives the *Inextinguishable* symphony, in the note printed in the programme for the first performance on 1 February 1916: 'The composer, in using the title *The Inextinguishable*, has attempted to suggest in a single word what only the music itself has the power to express fully: the elementary will to life. Faced with a task like this – to express life abstractly, where the other arts stand without resources, forced to go roundabout ways, to extract, to symbolize – there and only there is music at home in its primal region, at ease in its element, simply because solely by being itself it has performed its task. For it is life there, where the others only represent and write about life. Life is indomitable and inextinguishable; the struggle, the wrestling, the generation and the wasting away go on today as yesterday, tomorrow as today, and everything returns. Once more: music is life, and like it inextinguishable. For that reason the word that the composer has set above his work might seem superfluous; however, he has used it to emphasize the strictly musical character of his task. No programme, but a signpost into music's own domain.'<sup>43</sup>

42 Note that modern spelling veils the etymology of 'sandselige' (the sensuous); losing the 'd' disconnects the word from its root in 'truth'.

43 *Komponisten har ved Anvendelsen af Titelen 'Det uudslukkelige' med et enkelt Ord søgt at antyde, hvad kun selve Musiken har Magt til fuldt at udtrykke: den elementære Villie til Liv / Overfor Opgaver som denne: at udtrykke Liv abstrakt, hvor de andre Kunstarter staar uformuende, tvungne til at gøre Omveje, gøre Udsnit, symbolisere, dér og først dér er Musiken hjemme paa sit Ur-Omraade, ret i sit Element, simpelthen fordi den, ved kun at være sig selv, har løst sin Opgave. Thi den er Liv dér, hvor de andre kun forestiller og omskriver Liv. Livet er ukueligt og uudslukkeligt, der kæmpes, brydes, avles og fortæres idag som igaar, imorgen som idag, og alting vender tilbage. / Endnu engang: Musik er Liv, som dette uudslukkeligt. Derfor kunde det Ord, Komponisten har sat over sit Værk, synes overflødig; han har imidlertid anvendt det for at understrege sin Opgaves strengt musikalske Karakter. Intet Program, men en Vejviser*

Nielsen goes much further than Kierkegaard in suggesting that music is not just an embodiment of beauty, but the embodiment of life itself. But the germ of that idea, too, is in Kierkegaard's writing:

...sensuousness in all its elemental originality is the absolute theme of music. The sensuous in its essential nature is absolutely lyrical, and in music it erupts in all its lyrical impatience. That is, it is qualified by spirit and therefore is power, life, movement, continual unrest, continual succession. But this unrest, this succession, does not enrich it; it continually remains the same; it does not unfold but incessantly rushes forward as if in a single breath. If I were to describe this lyricism with a single predicate, I would have to say: It sounds – and with this I come back again to the elemental originality of the sensuous as that which in its immediacy manifests itself musically.<sup>44</sup>

We know from his correspondence that Nielsen had become acquainted with the brothers Brandes (Edvard and Georg) by 1893, and have suggested that the connection may have been through their mutual friend, Hans Nicolaj Hansen. Georg Brandes had worked hard to promote a revival of interest in the works and ideas of Søren Kierkegaard, publishing a book about him in 1877.<sup>45</sup> It doesn't seem unreasonable to suppose that, whether done with mention of Kierkegaard's name or not, these ideas may have passed to Nielsen in a conversation or conversations with Georg Brandes.

So we have seen that by 1916, Nielsen had developed his ideas about the 'meaning' of music, having clearly been influenced by the Vitalist movement but retaining a memory of some of the language as well as the Platonic framework from the conversations

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*ind paa Musikens eget Omraade.* Claus Røllum-Larsen (ed.) *Carl Nielsen Works II/4*, Symphony No. 4, xiii-xiv. Røllum-Larsen quotes further examples of Nielsen's writing about his sense of the relationship between music, words and life that repay re-reading in the light of this Kierkegaardian background.

<sup>44</sup> *Sandselig Genialitet er altsaa Musikkens absolute Gjenstand. Sandselig Genialitet er absolut lyrisk, og i Musikken kommer den til Udbrud i hele sin lyriske Utaalmodighed; den er nemlig aandelig bestemt og er derfor Kraft, Liv, Bevægelse, bestandig Uro, bestandig Succession, men denne Uro, denne Succession beriger den ikke, den bliver bestandig den samme, den udfolder sig ikke, men stormer uafbrudt frem ligesom i eet Aandedrag. Naar jeg nu med et eneste Prædikat skulde betegne denne Lyriskhed, saa maatte jeg sige: den toner; og hermed er jeg da atter kommen tilbage paa den sandselige Genialitet som den, der viser sig umiddelbar musikalsk. Enten – Eller,* første del, vol. 2 of Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter, Copenhagen 1997, 77. Translation from *Either/Or*, trans. and ed. H. and E. Hong, vol. 1, 55. Note that the Danish 'Sandselig Genialitet' might be more precisely rendered as 'sensuous genius'.

<sup>45</sup> See entries in [www.denstoredanske.dk](http://www.denstoredanske.dk) for biographies of Georg and Edvard Brandes.

he seems likely to have had with Georg Brandes and others in the early 1890s. The sense remains that unbridled sensuality, too much emphasis on the physicality of music, and a loss of focus on the ideal music is meant to embody, is a risk, and a solution is proposed to the paradox which Kierkegaard and before him Thorvaldsen and Eckersberg had explored: Nielsen, when he says that music *is* life, is asserting that in the most rigorous manifestation of 'truth', the music *becomes* the ideal it embodies, and thus resolves the neo-classical paradox. In its sheer energy, music transcends mere sensuality and simply *is*.

Back in 1891, twenty five years before he composed *The Inextinguishable* and penned these remarks, and when he had just married Anne-Marie Brodersen, Nielsen was clearly learning from all his experiences with a wide circle of acquaintance, and in a number of different spheres. His correspondence with his wife in the years which followed their marriage shows that she sometimes asked for his views on her work: when she was in Kolding in September 1896, and Nielsen in Copenhagen, she asks whether he can't come over for a visit: 'I would also really like to know your thoughts on my work as I'm in two minds about which of the casts I have done I should keep to use in my studies. The stallion in Vonsild has a distinctive body and I hope I will get something out of the whole [process].'<sup>46</sup> Nielsen was only allowed to go so far, though: when he expressed concern about the physical work involved in this project, he was very firmly rebuked by his sister-in-law,<sup>47</sup> and the 'interference' caused a significant disagreement between the couple.

Relatively little documentary material survives from the early years of the Niensens' marriage, after their return from Paris via Basel, Lugano, Milan, Florence, Rome, Venice and Padua in 1891.<sup>48</sup> Nielsen mentions Botticelli's *Primavera* in the course

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46 [...] jeg vilde også gerne vide Din Mening om mit Arbejde da jeg står i Beråd med hvilket af Udkastene jeg har gjort jeg skal holde mig til med mine Studier. Hingsten i Vonsild har en udmærket Krop og jeg håber jeg får noget ud af det Hele. CNB, vol. 1, 452, letter 578. The equine project that AMC-N had started work on was for a competition for a mounted statue of Queen Margrethe I. It was only in 2006 that the monument was erected in Københavnsvej in Roskilde. See 'Dronning Margrethe I' by Gitte Haastrup in *Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen, en registrant over billedhuggerens værker*, Odense 2010, 165-171. The very next letter in CNB, vol. 1 454-456, letter 579, CN to AMCN (25.9.1896), mentions the couple's friendship with Axel Orlrik and his wife Sofie, with whom Nielsen was working on *Hymnus Amoris*. See *Carl Nielsen Works* III/1, xii.

47 The letter from Anne Marie's sister, Lucie Brodersen, is in CNB, vol. 1, 474-475.

48 We should note that Nielsen records meeting J.P. Willumsen on the couple's last day in Paris 'with the horse', most likely a reference to the 'Hoppe med sit Føl' which Anne-Marie appears to have submitted (unsuccessfully) for inclusion in an Independent Exhibition. The work in question could have



of an account of a mystic experience in August 1892: 'I could not sleep last night and read a part of the Bible. Try once and read the beginning of St. John's Gospel. Don't you think there is an amazing depth and mysticism? Just the first verse. Especially I think of this: And the light shineth in darkness[,] The darkness comprehended it not. But on the whole there is a special subdued mysticism about it all. I came to think about the woods in Botticelli's Spring. The trees are half people, half plants, and when they talk together it sounds like a blending of whistling and human voices.'<sup>49</sup>

A few sporadic diary entries in 1893 reveal a little about Nielsen's developing tastes, including enthusiasm for both Dürer and Van Gogh. We read, 'To the exhibition with Marie and Lucie [Brodersen]. Gauguin is at bottom incoherent, like most of the modern artists actually. No solidity, but much talent. Nothing [but] experiments and nearly not a single complete artwork. The Danish painters are lesser talents but some of them hang together better.'<sup>50</sup> But then a few days later, Nielsen writes, 'The 25 pictures by van Gogh kill Gauguin. He is strong and wild in his intentions, and in him one finds a certainly often rare and baroque, but complete and original person. All the other pictures at the exhibition seem bleached and bland in comparison with his, and the comparison is one which one can not easily let go of.'<sup>51</sup>

We also see that Nielsen is now actively conversing with Georg Brandes, and here specifically on the translation of song texts. 'At Georg Brandes', and borrowed his manuscript to the translation of the Song of Solomon. We talked together for a long time about Napoleon, Voltaire[,] Christ and the Inner Mission. Brandes' gifts are

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been either of two works by her with this name, an early relief now held by Odense Bys Museer or a statuette dated 1887. See *Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen*, 314-315. Nielsen's diary notes on the matter can be found in CNB vol. 1, entries 270-274 (5-12.4.1891) 220-221.

49 *Jeg kunde ikke sove sidste Nat og læste en Dæl i Biblen. Prøv engang og læs Begyndelsen af Johannes Evangelium. Synes Du ikke det er forunderlig dybt og mystisk? Blot de første Vers. Især synes jeg om det: Og Lyset skinnede i Mørket[.] Mørket begreb det ikke. Men der er i det Hele taget en sær dæmpet Mystik over det Altsammen. Jeg kom til at tænke paa Skoven i Botticellis Foraaret. Træerne ere halvt Mennesker halvt Planter og naar de taler sammen lyder det som en Blanding af Susen og Menneskerøster.* CNB vol. 1, 263-264, letter 345 (27.8.1892) to AMCN.

50 *Paa den fri Udstilling med Marie og Lucie [Brodersen]. / Gauguin [Gauguin] er i Grunden usammenhængende, som de fleste moderne Kunstnere overhovedet. Ingen Fasthed, men meget Talent. Lutter Experimenter og næsten ikke et eneste helt Kunstværk. De danske Malere ere mindre Talenter men nogle af dem hænger bedre sammen.* CNB vol. 1, 294, diary entry 403 (26.3.1893).

51 *De 25 Billeder af van Goch slaar Gauguin ihjel. Han er stærk og vild i sin Villie og hos ham finder man et ganske vidst ofte sært og barokt, men hélt og originalt Menneske. Alle de andre Billeder paa Udstillingen bliver blege og bløde i Sammenligning med hans, og sammenligne kan man jo ikke godt lade være med.* CNB vol. 1, 295, diary entry 405 (30.3.1893).

of a sparkling, burning nature. He is continually wide awake. I have the same feeling when I talk with him as when I fence with a foil at Berthelsen's.<sup>52</sup>

Nielsen's avid reading, and his habit of recording his thoughts about what he had read and seen in his diary, continued in the autumn of 1893: 'Have read Machiavelli's "The Prince". Yes, what should one say about such a book. I cannot be scandalised by it. On the contrary! It is like steel and stone, everything that there is in the little book. Every sentence is like a sharp-edged weapon and every chapter like a bloody battle. Short to say: this is definitely a character. I wonder if Napoleon I should not have read "The Prince"?'<sup>53</sup> Then, 'On my sickbed I have also read Benvenuto Cellini's autobiography.'<sup>54</sup>

From November 1893 we have a long and thoughtful diary entry about Dürer, as Nielsen criticises a book he has read, saying: 'Read for the moment Anton Springer's book about Albrecht Dürer...[which] is not wholly good. The author has neither imagination nor artistic taste enough to be able to judge so strange and wonderful an artist as Dürer. But one gets much good information both as person and artist, and in a way the author says many brilliant things, which could well pass in an art-historical work'. And here we have a rare record that the couple have been talking about art: 'The other day Marie and I spoke precisely about this defiant figure – when we turned over the pages of the book between us and saw the pictures – and we were agreed that he would fit brilliantly amongst the Renaissance's strongest and wildest times, as a military or civilian leader.'<sup>55</sup> Perhaps the level of detail in this diary entry

52 *Hos Georg Brandes og laante hans Manuskript til Oversættelsen af Højsangen. / Vi talte længe sammen om Napoleon, Voltaire[,] Christus og den Indre Mission. Brandes Begavelse er af den gnistrende, tændende Art. Han er bestandig lysvaagen. Jeg har samme Følelse naar jeg taler med ham som naar jeg fægter contra med Floret hos Berthelsen.* CNB vol. 1, 297, diary entry 413 (28.5.1893). I'm grateful to Eskil Irminger for this information about 'the Inner Mission': Nielsen and Brandes are speaking about Indre Mission, which was (and still is) a powerful evangelical wing of the Church of Denmark. The movement was founded by Vilhelm Beck.

53 *Har læst Machiavellis 'Fyrsten'. Ja, hvad skal man sige om en saadan Bog. Forarges kan jeg ikke over den. Tvertimod! Det er som Staal og Sten alt hvad der staar i den lille Bog. Hver Sætning er som et skapslebet Vaaben og hvert Capitel som et blodigt Slag. Kort sagt: det er da endelig engang en Karakter. / Mon ikke Napoleon I skulde have læst 'Fyrsten'?* CNB vol. 1, 310, diary entry 430 (29.10.1893).

54 *Jeg har undere mit Sygeleje ligeledes læst Benvenuto Cellinis Selvbibliografi.* CNB vol. 1, 310, diary entry 431 (30.10.1893).

55 *Læser for Øjeblikket Anton Springers Bog om Albrecht Dürer [...] [som] er ikke helt god. Forfatteren har hverken Fantasi eller Kunstforstand nok til at kunne bedømme en saa ejendommeligt og vidunderligt Kunstner som Dürer. Men man faar mange gode Oplysninger om Dürer baade som Menneske og Kunstner, og Forfatteren siger mange i og for sig aandrige Ting, som dog ligesaa godt kunne passe ind i et hvilkenkomhelst kunsthistorisk Værk. [...] Forleden Dag talte Marie og jeg netop om denne trodsige Skikkelse – da vi bladede Bogen igjennem og saa Billederne – og vi var enige om at han vilde passe glimrende ind i Renaissancens kraftigste og vildeste Tid, som Hærfører eller Høvding.* CNB vol. 1, 315-316 diary entry 447 (19.11.1893).

suggests that Nielsen was already hoping, a year before the support was confirmed, that he would be able to travel again to see these works?

It was in October 1894 that Nielsen received support from the Culture Ministry for a second extended European tour; because she needed to remain at home to look after their children, we have letters between Anne Marie and Carl which contain much of interest.

The degree of Nielsen's determination to get straight into the art galleries is evident in the first diary entry we have from his journey: 'I was not able to come into the gallery today, it cost me a great deal of effort; but I will keep my obligation towards my work at once so the other must unfortunately be of secondary importance.'<sup>56</sup>

Nielsen wrote to Marie two days later:

Yesterday I was in the gallery and thought the whole time about you. I talked with Julius Lange,<sup>57</sup> he was going to Italy. He was surprised that I went into the sculpture department and did not have you with.

So far I do not think so much of the things from the burial sites in Pergamon, and on the whole I don't think very much of the sculpture that is found in the museum here, but that is only my opinion so far; I have not looked through it as thoroughly as I now have in mind. A few lovely things caught my eye straight away. I didn't have the time to get into the Egyptian department. I was just up in the Italian painting department. That was charming. There was a portrait of a young man with coal black hair styled smooth and parted in the middle in the Florentine manner and with a nearly rose-violet jacket on. It was a head and shoulders portrait. He was lovely! Big black, clever eyes looking out at the spectator with this turn of his head you know Albrecht Dürer and Raphael often have and which we have said gives Dürer's portraits especially their strange deep seriousness.

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56 *Jeg naaede ikke at komme i Galleriet idag, det var en stor Overvindelse; men jeg vil strax gjøre min Pligt mod mine Arbejder saa maa det andet desværre komme i anden Række.* CNB vol. 1, 335-336, diary entry 477 (12.10.1894), Berlin.

57 It is a measure of the fragmentary nature of the documentary records surviving, upon which this article is based, that Julius Lange (1838-1896), an art historian and critic, is mentioned only three times in the first volume of Carl Nielsen's correspondence and diaries, in entries 467-468 and, quoted above, 479. The earlier pair relate to a review by Lange in *Berlingske Tidende* on 20.8.1894 which referred to a sculpture by AMCN. See CNB vol. 1, 329-330, for details. It seems clear from the tone of the Niensens' references to Lange that he was well known to them, if not a close acquaintance – but these references are all that survive from this period.

Notice that most good portraits have a serious expression. Why is that? We shall talk about that later, and it can certainly be the basis for more thought. This picture was by Giorgione. How happy one really is in the moment one is filled with such an artwork. It ran cold down my back and I could have cried with happiness. It is like all my soul's pores are open when I am travelling.

It isn't true with music, though. There I am always sceptical and rather cold and feel no enrichment, because I always feel that I can both direct and compose better than these people.

The gallery has acquired two new Italian pictures by an old artist whose name I cannot remember. They were very strange and had their own personality behind them. He lived before Raphael. Tomorrow I will go back again. If only you were here! Do come and fetch me, then we three shall really enjoy ourselves together.<sup>58</sup>

The sheer volume and detail of Nielsen's diary entries, his commentary on the works he sees over the next few months and the exchanges between him and Marie about them, prohibits their reproduction here: they must be consulted in the first volume of the edition of his letters, where they illuminate the composer's account of his visit to

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58 Igaar var jeg i Galleriet og tænkte hele Tiden paa Dig. Julius Lange talte jeg med, han skulde til Italien. Han var forbauset over at jeg gik der i Skulpturafdelingen og ikke havde Dig med.

Foreløbig synes jeg ikke saa meget om de Ting fra Udgravningerne i Pergamon, og i det hele synes jeg ikke om ret meget af den Skulptur der findes i Musæet her, men det er kun min foreløbige Mening; jeg har ikke saa grundigt set det igennem som jeg har isinde. Enkelte dejlige Ting var der strax at faa Øje paa. I den ægyptiske Afdeling naaede jeg slet [ikke] at komme. Jeg var lige oppe i den italienske Maleri-Afdeling. Det var dog henrivende. Der var et Portrait af en ung Mand med kulsort Haar glat redt og skilt i Midten paa florentisk Maner og med en nærmest rosa-violet Trøje paa. Det var Brystbillede. Han var dejlig! Store sorte, kloge Øjne som saa ud paa Beskueren med denne Drejning. Du véd Albrecht Dürer og Rafael tit har og som vi har talt om giver navnlig Dürers Portrætter Den ejendommelig dybe Alvor

Læg mærke til, at de fleste gode Portrætter har et alvorligt Udtryk. Hvoraf kommer det? Vi skal senere tale om det, og der kan sikkert være Grund til Eftertanke. Dette Billede var af Giorgione. Hvor er man dog egentlig lykkelig i det Øjeblik man fyldes af et saadant Kunstværk. Det løb mig koldt ned af Ryggen og jeg kunde have grædt af Glæde. Du maa ikke le af mig, min egen Ven, fordi jeg er saa rørende. Det er ligesom alle min Sjæls Porer er aabne, naar jeg er paa Rejse. Det gjaelder dog ikke overfor Musik. Der er jeg altid skeptisk og temmelig kold og føler ingen Berigelse, fordi jeg føler bestandig at jeg kan baade dirigere] og komponere bedre end disse Folk.

Galleriet har erhvervet to nye italienske Billeder af en gammel Kunstner hvis Navn jeg ikke husker. De var meget ejendommelige og havde sin egen Personlighed bagved. Han levede før Rafael. Imorgen skal jeg atter derhen. Gid Du dog var her! Du maa endelig komme og hente mig, saa skal vi tre rigtig nyde sammen. CNB vol. 1, 338, letter 479 (14.10.1894) to AMCN from Berlin.

Brahms' apartment, which took place during this trip. I only remark on Nielsen's highly visual way of engaging with the places he visits; the diary entries and letters 497-500 describe places he's eating in a way that a professional author would be pleased to have achieved. Nielsen says: 'the whole formed a picture that I won't forget'.<sup>59</sup> These documents neatly illustrate Nielsen's close attention to his surroundings and his capacity to 'tell a story'.<sup>60</sup>

Lisbeth Ahlgren Jensen has summarised the documentary material which relates to the composition and reception of *Hymnus Amoris* in her excellent introduction to the score in the *Carl Nielsen Edition* III/1, Cantatas 1. She draws attention to the suggestion by Meyer and Petersen, based on a memory of Irmelin (Eggert Møller) that the first idea for the work came from seeing a work by Titian in Padua, *The Miracle of the Jealous Husband*.<sup>61</sup> There is correspondence between Nielsen and Bror Beckmann, a Swedish composer, and detailed reference to the reviews which greeted the first performance, and, for the most part, grumbled about the text being in Latin. The composer's own, perhaps rather light-hearted explanation for that choice is quoted: 'I think I can defend my choice of Latin by saying that this language is monumental and elevates one above over-lyrical or personal feelings which would be out of place where the object is to use a large polyphonic choir to describe such a universally human feeling as love. In addition, this language is more singable than Danish or German, and finally – as the most important reason – the textural repetitions are more tolerable in Latin.'<sup>62</sup> But can we find any further information about why Nielsen chose Latin?

Given the earlier speculation that Nielsen may have been introduced to the ideas, and specifically the neo-platonic aesthetics, of Søren Kierkegaard through his friendship with Georg Brandes, it's interesting to note that Nielsen and Brandes were talking to each other about artistic matters of shared interest at this time, judging by one preserved letter about visiting the workshop of the artist Max Klinger: 'Prof. Lehrts explained that Klinger is currently working on a large sculpted work which presents Beethoven sitting on a high throne surrounded by symbolic and allegorical figures, and as my wife as a sculptress and I as a musician are really interested in Klin-

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59 *det Hele dannede et Billede som jeg ikke glemmer*. CNB vol. 1, 364-365, letter 499.

60 CNB vol. 1, 363-368, entries 497-500. See also Colin Roth, 'Carl Nielsen and the Danish Tradition of Story-telling' in *Carl Nielsen Studies* 4 (2009).

61 *Carl Nielsen Works* III/1, xi.

62 *At jeg har valgt Latin, mener jeg at kunne forsvare derved, at dette Sprog er monumental og hæver En ud over alt for lyriske eller personlige Fornemmelser, der ikke vilde være paa deres Plads, hvor Talen er om gjennem et stort polyfont Kor at skildre en saa almenmenneskelig Magt som Kjærligheden. Desuden er dette Sprog mere sangbart end Dansk eller Tysk og endelig – som den vægtigste Grund – taales Textgjentagelserne bedre paa Latin*. CNU vol. III/1, xii-xiii.

ger's activity and would very much like to see his new composition, so I beg you, dear Herr Doctor, to send me some words of recommendation for my wife and me to Herr Klinger, with the help of which we certainly will be able to gain access to his atelier.'<sup>63</sup>

A week before he wrote to Brandes about visiting Klinger's studio, on 11 November, Nielsen was in the Art History Museum in Vienna, comparing works by Albrecht Dürer and Peter Paul Rubens, as well as van Eyck and the older Brueghel. He writes: 'Of Rubens can be found here a huge number of large pictures which I am unable to compel myself to find a deeper interest in apart from a single one. It shows a naked plump woman who – how sensuously felt – is busy wrapping herself in a shaggy skin. It was masterfully "done" both in form and colour and especially a part around the one knee was excellently painted. Otherwise there were nothing but big routine pictures of religious and secular subjects; scenes from the Bible and scenes where frisky fauns dance with sensuously fat nymphs in a way which could make you blush. I noticed an older, really fine married couple with two young daughters who put themselves up before such an indecent picture. The young girls looked first amazed and then they smirked to each other, and when the parents went on they sent stealthy glances to that part of the picture where a faun grips a woman in the most refined way. – This side of art has no, absolutely no justification, no matter how well done; so where does this come from and how does it affect you? All art is in its essence the opposite of sensuality and as soon as this comes in, is it no longer high and clean art and one sees that also in history that where there is no higher goal, art rots and disappears. Only the deeply religious art will survive and I take the greatest masters take I as evidence of that. I don't think that a man must be a Christian, Jew or Muslim to be able to make good art; but he must, short to say, be filled with high and holy seriousness when he goes to work. Rubens is so far from this. A man of the world, pretty sublime in his whole conduct, a man of pleasure who wallows in pleasure and drags others into it with him, a rich and fertile nature without strength a mighty, splendid looking – watermelon; such is he.'<sup>64</sup> The key phrase here, the one which stems from

63 Prof: Lehrts fortalte, at Klinger for tiden arbejder paa et stort plastisk Værk som forestiller Bjelethoven siddende paa en høj Trone omgivet af symbolske og allegoriske Figurer, og da min Hustru som Billedhuggerinde og jeg som Musiker højlig interesserer os for Klingers Virksomhed og meget gjerne vilde se hans nye Komposition, saa beder jeg Dem, kjære Hr: Doctor, om at sende mig nogle anbefalende Ord for min Hustru og mig til Hr. Klinger, ved Hjælp af hvilke vi sikkert vil kunne faa Adgang til hans Atelier. CNB vol. 1, 394-396, letter 523 (19.11.1894) CN (Dresden) to Georg Brandes.

64 Af Rubens findes her et Utal af store Billeder som jeg ikke kunde afvinde dybere Interesse paa et eneste nær. Det er en nøgen, fyldig Kvinde som – (hvor sandseligt følt!) – staar og er ifærd med at indhylle sig i en laadden Pels. Det var mesterligt 'gjort' baade i Form og Farve og navnlig et Parti omkring det ene Knæ var udmærket

Platonic aesthetics and which prefigures the later choice of Latin for the text of *Hymnus Amoris*, is: 'All art is in its essence the opposite of sensuality and as soon as this [sensuality] comes in, is it no longer high and clean art'.

From the 'masterfully done' Rubens, Nielsen moves on to Dürer: 'From there I went in to Dürer. The pictures which can be found here cannot be compared with those in Munich or Berlin; but even so there is enough to be delighted with. What seriousness and purity; the change from Rubens was marked. It was as if I had been to a big, pretty party, where knights with orders and dames in silk swung by each other, while servants resembled counts and barons and where I stood in a corner in my poor costume listening to all the deceitful speeches and modes of speech and to music which played the most lecherous melodies, while bishops and prelates said mass and at the same time gave the church's blessing to the dancing, drinking and whoring people. Now again I was I in a quiet room; where a dear friend greeted me gently, pressed my hand and looked me in the eye with his deep, still smile, and I could rest myself and be myself. Choose!'<sup>65</sup>

So manifesting sensuality (*sandselighed*) in the physicality of paint brings an inappropriate ordinariness, 'vulgarity' in the true sense of that word (as stemming

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*malet. Ellers var det lutter store ruitinerede Billeder af religiøst(!) og verdsligt Indhold; Scener af Bibelen og Scener hvor kaade Fauner danser med sandselig-fede Nymfner paa en Maade saa man bliver skamfuld derved. Jeg lagde Mærke til et ældre, ret fint Ægtepar med to unge Døtre som stillede sig op foran et sa[aldant] uanstændigt Billede. De unge Piger saa først forbløffede ud saa smiskede de til hinanden, og da Forældrene saa gik videre sendte de stjaalne Blikke til den Del af Billedet hvor en Faun griber en Kvinde paa den mest rafinerede Maade. – Den Side i Kunsten har ingen, absolut ingen Berettigelse, selv om det er nok saa godt gjort; thi hvad udspringer det af og hvorledes virker det igjen? Al Kunst er i sit Væsen det modsatte af Sandselighed og saasnart det kommer ind med, er det ikke længere høj og røn Kunst og man ser det ogsaa i Historien at hvor der intet højere Maal er, raadner og forsvinder Kunsten. Kun den dybt religiøse Kunst vil leve og de største Mestre tager jeg til Bevis herpaa. Jeg mener ikke at et Menneske skal være Kristen, Jøde eller Muhamedaner for at kunne skabe god Kunst; men han skal, kort sagt, være opfyldt af høj og hellig Alvor naar han gaar tilværks. Det er Rubens saa langt fra som nogen. En Verdensmand, ret storslaaet i sin hele Færd, en Levemand som svælger i Nydelse og trækker andre med deri, en rig og frodig Natur uden Kraft en mægtig, pragtfuld udseende – Vandmelon; saaledes er han. CNB vol. 1, 386-389, diary entry 516 (11.11.1894), Vienna.*

65 *Derfra gik jeg ind til Dürer. De Billeder som findes her kan ikke maale sig med dem i München og Berlin; men endda er der nok at glæde sig over. Hvilken Alvor og Rønhed; Overgangen fra Rubens var mærkelig. Det var som om jeg havde været i et stort, flot Selskab, hvor Herrer med Ordener og Damer i Silke svingede forbi hinanden, hvor Tjenerne lignede Grever og Baronier og hvor jeg stod i en Krog i min tarvelige Dragt og hørte paa alle de løgnagtige Taler og Talemaader og paa Musiken som spillede liderligste Melodier, medens Bisper og Prælater messede og samtidig lyste Kirkens Velsignelse over de dansende, drikkende og horende Mennesker. – Nu var jeg atter i en rolig Stue; hvor en kjær Ven tog stilfærdig imod mig trykkede min Haand og saa mig med sit dybe, stille Smil ind i Øjet og jeg kunde hvile mig og være mig selv. Vælg! Ibid., 386-389, diary entry 516 (11.11.1894), Vienna.*

from that which is 'common' to all) which diminishes its value as art. The Dürer, by contrast, allows him (the viewer) to retain a clear sense of his own self by manifesting an articulated dialogue: the artist comes quietly towards the viewer, offering his hand rather than grabbing him by the throat.

Clearly the strength of the reaction to the Rubens, and the preference for the calmer, less assertive Dürer, tells us something about Nielsen's high level of sensitivity to these art works and the way they addressed their audience. In making this observation, though, I'm not trying to suggest that Nielsen was excessively sensitive, but rather to draw attention to a division that had developed in nineteenth century ideas and practice, and which was most articulately described at the beginning of the century by the English poet, William Wordsworth.

In the expanded preface Wordsworth wrote in 1802 to his and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*, he says that the artist communicates what he experiences to give the common man the opportunity to share what only the artist is sensitive enough to feel directly.<sup>66</sup>

In her preface to *Hymnus Amoris*, Lisbeth Ahlgren Jensen draws attention to the divergence between the composer's preference for Latin and the general disapproval of the critics who heard the first performance. They seem not to have appreciated the 'universality' of the gesture, wishing instead for the more 'direct' communication of their own language. That Nielsen recognised the divergence of view is evident from his acceptance that a Danish text should be published in the programme for the performance. What I am suggesting is that contemporary culture, the complex and multistranded fabric of 'Romanticism', encouraged a division between the highly sensitive (perhaps only because it was so well practised by artists, expected to be so sensitive as well as highly articulate about what they experience) and the more passive sensibility which an 'ordinary' viewer or 'receiver' was expected to manifest. This fundamental proposition of mainstream 'Romanticism', that the artist is, in themselves, the guide to what can and should be felt, and that the role of an audience member is to receive, to take feelings from the artist's reworking of their original experience into an artwork, encouraged divergence. The artist is trained to be hypersensitive; the audience is trained to expect emotion to be manifest in a work of art, rather than for it to be withheld, inviting them to participate more actively in sharing the experience. It is this duality that generates the 'chill' which 'neo-classicism' generates. Audiences are encouraged by 'Romantic' art to sit quietly so that the artist can make them have feelings. Unused to participating actively in the communication, they ex-

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66 Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads 1798*, ed. W.J.B. Owen, London 1969, 165. The idea referred to here forms part of an extended meditation on the question, 'What is a poet?', which was part of the material added in 1802.



perience works which invite sensitivity as ‘cold’ and ‘unemotional’ or ‘impersonal’.<sup>67</sup> This is the discontinuity between the experience of a sensitive person and the intellectual constructs which they believed applied to the significance of what they felt which Søren Kierkegaard was exploring in his writing.

So the highly trained sensibility which makes Nielsen recoil from Rubens, which we can see as a manifestation of the distaste for mere physicality in art expressed by Kierkegaard, is the special preserve of ‘the artist’, a level of sensibility to which audience members could only aspire.<sup>68</sup>

We have traced a line through Danish culture, from self-evidently Platonic neo-classicists working at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, through the writing of Søren Kierkegaard, to one single aspect of the *Hymnus Amoris* of Carl Nielsen.<sup>69</sup> We have looked forward to his fourth symphony and seen that, in

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67 Colin Roth, *Interdisciplinary Parallels: the creative process in certain European artists 1880-1914*, Ph.D thesis, University of Sheffield 1982. We should note here that Nielsen, in 1894-1897, makes the same choice about the language of his text for *Hymnus Amoris* as Stravinsky was to do later for his *Oedipus Rex*, and for virtually the same reasons, in Nielsen’s case on the basis of a Franco-Danish neo-classicism, and in Stravinsky’s on the basis of a more purely French tradition.

68 And aspire they did: the argument of my Ph.D. thesis is that audiences developed their competence, and their perception of their own competence and capacity as feeling beings, gradually pushing artists towards more and more extreme expressions of hypersensitivity, for example in the sequence of ballets Michael Fokine composed for Diaghilev, the series paintings of Monet, the multi-volume novel based on the taste of a *madelaine* dipped in *tisane* by Marcel Proust, the architecture of Charles Rennie Macintosh, the motivic development which characterises the work of Claude Debussy and the dream-based model of psychotherapy developed by Sigmund Freud. The impact of this *zeitgeist*, the public perception of what it was to be an artist and its meaning for their own sensory-lives, can be recognised across interdisciplinary boundaries and artistic disciplines right through European culture in the thirty years before the Great War.

69 Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen made a lithograph as title page for *Hymnus Amoris*, one of only six cover designs for her husband’s work that were published. See *Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen: en registrant over billedhuggerens værker*, Odense 2010, 472-473. Nielsen wrote a dedication in a copy of the piano score he gave her on 11.3.1898: ‘To my own Marie! These tones on the value of love barely approach the reality, but if you will always love me, I will strive to gain a higher expression of the strongest power in the world, and then we two together shall rise higher and higher towards the goal and all our efforts shall be love in life and in art.’ (*Til min egen Marie! / Disse Toner til Kjærlighedens Pris er kun saa lidt imod det Virkelige; men naar Du bestandig vil holde af mig saa vil jeg stræbe efter at naa et højere Udtryk for den stærkeste Magt i Verden, og saa skal vi to sammen stige højere og højere imod Maalet og al vor stræben skal være Kjærligheden i Livet og i Kunsten*. Quoted from CNU vol. III/1 xii.) It seems to me that the design owes more to *Art Nouveau* and Vitalism than the Kierkegaardian aesthetics discussed here, but I leave the issue of mutual influence (or not) between the Nielsens, and discussion of AMCN’s work, for another occasion.

the twenty five years which followed *Hymnus Amoris*, the 'Platonic neo-classicisms' embodied in Nielsen's contrasting reactions to Rubens and Dürer and the choice of Latin for the text of *Hymnus Amoris* seem to have been enriched and developed, perhaps by contact with Vitalist ideas or other stimuli, maybe including the response of audiences to his works, to the point where he sees music's physicality as a direct embodiment of life, rather than as a manifestation of an ideal beyond physicality. Kierkegaard's aesthetics, as passed to Nielsen by Brandes, are the basis for his own 'philosophical' growth, leaving their trace in his words and the form of his ideas, and providing a platform from which Nielsen's 'calm hand' can grasp his listener more vigorously than an ordinary neo-classicist might have done. He tackles, in other words, the same paradox that Kierkegaard addressed, to help integrate one's experience of feeling and one's understanding of its meaning and importance.

#### A B S T R A C T

In this paper Colin Roth examines the documentary record for insights into the composer's developing enthusiasm for fine art in his early years, and considers their implications for our understanding of his music-compositional process and creative path. He looks back to the emergence of a strong and persistent interaction with French cultural values and aesthetics in 'the Golden Age' and traces the path of its Platonic neo-classicism as a distinctively Danish contribution to 'romanticism's double helix', from Eckersberg and Thorvaldsen through Kierkegaard and then to Georg Brandes and Carl Nielsen, revealing a source in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* of Nielsen's best known remarks about his own music. It is Nielsen's perception that 'all art is in its essence the opposite of sensuality and as soon as this [sensuality] comes in, is it no longer high and clean art', written about Rubens in 1894, which helps to illuminate the choice of a Latin text in *Hymnus Amoris*. In asking what we can learn about Nielsen's way of learning from studying his self-education in art, and about what he learned as a young man and from whom, our knowledge of the development of Nielsen's musical aesthetics and outlook is enriched.