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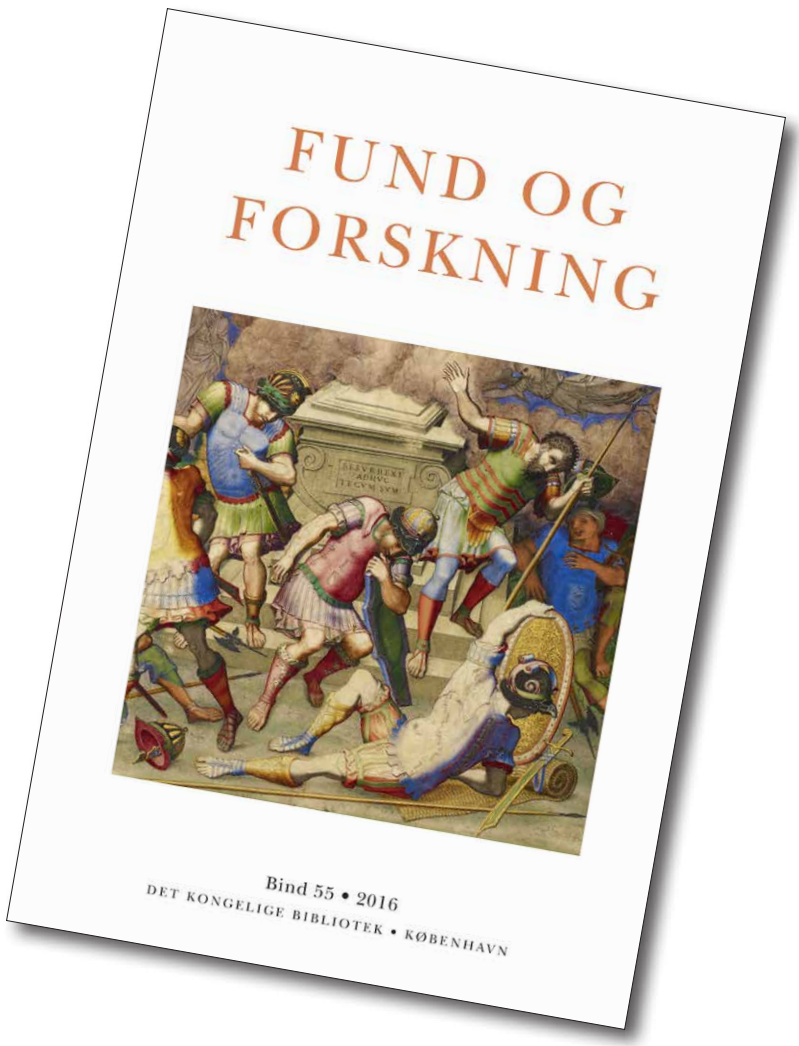

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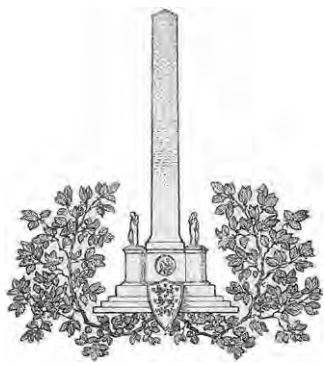

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CARL NIELSEN: RADICAL

BY

COLIN ROTH

Many scholars have been intrigued by the gaping hole in our documentary and evidential record of Carl Nielsen's early life. We know a respectable amount about his childhood, though some of that comes filtered through his own tender feelings, expressed in his autobiography, *Min fynske barndom*.[1] And from the late 1880s, when the young musician-graduate launched himself as performer and composer, we now have letters, diaries and documents to hand.[2] But there is so little known — and therefore understood — about Nielsen's time in Copenhagen, training at the Conservatoire and finding his feet as an adult.

What we do know of that period, 1884–1886, comes to us from later correspondence which tells us who Carl Nielsen had been befriended by, and something about what he was interested in. Much of this material emerged in the course of John Fellow's research into and publication of documents relating to Nielsen, and concerns his early relations with young women.[3]

But what I want to know about that three year space in our knowledge is not that he spent some of it learning who, and how, to love. It is his intellectual and artistic path — from his *fynske* childhood, which seem to have contained quite significant exposure to, and experience of, serious music (so not quite the H. C. Andersen version of an Odense

[1] *Min fynske barndom*, 1927.

[2] Much of this material has been published as a part of the Danish government-sponsored project to ensure that Carl Nielsen's music and its documentary context are properly presented and safely preserved. The project was launched in 1994 and included the full edition of his music (*Carl Nielsen Udgaven*, 35 vols, 1994–2009) as well as documents (*Carl Nielsen til sin tid*, 3 vols, 1996) and letters (*Carl Nielsen Brevudgaven*, 12 vols, 2005–15).

[3] Emilie Demant Hatt, ed. John Fellow, *Foraarsbølger, erindringer om Carl Nielsen*, Copenhagen 2002 and John Fellow, *Vil Herren ikke hilse på sin Slægt*, Copenhagen 2005.

boy's escape) towards the intense learning and voracious cultural and intellectual appetites of the young man we meet in the letters and diaries recording his European tours in the early 90s.

Maybe it is the sheer mystery of not knowing that makes understanding Nielsen's college years so urgent a quest: unlocking the clues and piecing together a viable way of connecting the facts so that they seem to flow logically has much in common with reading a good *krimi*. The pages turn, the connections shift as you see them from a new perspective, and the possibilities of reinterpreting the material we 'know' seem to multiply endlessly.

So the purpose of this article is to better understand facts that are already known by seeing them in new ways, against different contextual backgrounds which have not been brought into play before. For the possibility of attempting that, I must thank Ole Nørlyng, whose book, *Et folkesagn*, contains a chapter about this very period in Danish history, which transformed my sense of what Carl Nielsen's time as a student in Copenhagen, between 1884–1886, might have been like.[4]

Let us begin with the 'facts' about Carl Nielsen's student days as they have been presented to musicians and music students in the years since his music gave us cause to be interested in them. We know that he learned the piano and violin at a tender age, and that he played with his violinist (and house-painter) father in the rural amateur music scene south of Odense. We know that he escaped—with great good fortune—from a planned apprenticeship to a grocer and went instead to be a musician in the local army corps, where he mastered the althorn, and we know that his duties as a soldier were light enough for him to continue playing the violin.[5] It was his excellence in this social musical world that led a group of well-to-do gentlemen to club together and support him in applying to attend the Conservatoire in Copenhagen. John Fellow identifies the Odense people involved: a 'café musician and

[4] *Et Folkesagn, fra Bournonville-idyl til syret Troldspejl*, Ole Nørlyng, Copenhagen 2013, pp. 241–45. And while offering thanks, I would like to express my gratitude to Niels Krabbe and Peter Hauge for the vigour with which they challenged these ideas, providing fire to light my search for understanding. I also wish to thank Eskil Irminger, whose help in guiding me to sources and resources with which I could build an understanding of the historical context for Nielsen's college years has been invaluable, as well as Matthew Holman and David Ross for their kind help and support while this article was being written, and Jens Henrik Koudal for his helpful advice on a late draft.

[5] Fellow, *Vil Herren…*, p. 33, quotes Emilie Demant's memory of the day when 'a little piperboy from the army' stood in her Uncle Jens' yard and played, a memory which clearly predates the formation of her friendship with the boy in 1887.

revue accompanist' Olfert Jespersen, who seems to have proposed the idea of Nielsen going to Copenhagen for a musical education, and his High School teacher, Klaus Berntsen, who facilitated his release from his post in the army; the merchant Jens Georg Nielsen and his wife Marie Cecilie Demant (married 1861)—in 1886 they moved from Odense to an apartment in Copenhagen at Slagelsegade 18, in Østerbro, 'to take better care of [Nielsen]' after he graduated from the Conservatoire;[6] Albert Sachs, a wholesaler (*grosserer*) who was a director of a firm making soap and oil, whose cousin, Emil B. Sachs, was to become one of Nielsen's closest friends in Copenhagen in the period we're studying; and the cycle and sewing machine manufacturer Hans Stephan Anthon Ludwig Demant. That most were connected in one way or another with Emile Demant, who would become the focus of Carl Nielsen's affections in 1887, is a distraction here because this article addresses the three year period in which Nielsen attended the Conservatoire (1884–1886), rather than the relationship with her which followed.

This group of businessmen, particularly Albert Sachs, who was a cousin of the Brandes brothers, have some connection to the Jewish immigration encouraged by the Danish government in the mid-eighteenth century.[7] It seems likely that Nielsen's 'discretion' in not naming his benefactors in *Min fynske barndom*, published in 1927, was rooted in concern that drawing attention to the fact that his training had been supported by money from Jewish benefactors would have been problematic at that time. One imagines that the same motivation would have encouraged Emilie Demant Hatt to refrain from mentioning the names in her unpublished memoirs, published in 2002.[8] John Fellow's comment (in *Vil Herren…* p.34) that Emilie's motives are 'uigennemskuelige' appears to camouflage a straightforward but uncomfortable truth, that anti-semitism was already a force in the Europe of the 1880s, when it was regularly discussed between the Brandes brothers, and that the fear of a Jewish 'taint' would have been very real for anyone writing in the 1920s.

Perhaps this is the point at which it is worth observing that the skill of weaving an interpretative veil across a mystery in order to appreciate its significance more completely has been devalued by our audit culture's insistence on evidence; this pedantry distorts our grasp of the

[6] Fellow, CNB 1, p. 39.

[7] See jewmus.dk/en/exhibition/the-five-dimensions/arrivals/german-conncetions/ [sic].

[8] J. Fellow ed., Emily Demant Hatt, *Foraarsbølger*.

the broader patterns of life, and has gone too far. It is time to restore something of the old skills which sought to draw 'a larger picture' so that these broader relationships and patterns can be better understood.

Our knowledge, as musicians, of Carl Nielsen's training at the Conservatoire is limited too: we know that he was taught by Orla Rosenhoff, with whom he continued to correspond after graduating, and that he was on good enough terms with Niels W Gade, co-founder and director of the Conservatoire, to ask for and receive an introduction to Johannes Brahms in 1894.[9] And of course we know from his career, his skills and competencies as well as his brother Albert's assurance, that Nielsen was a relatively assiduous student.[10]

It is time to consider those things that have not seemed so interesting or important to musicians and musicologists. What else did Nielsen do while he was studying in Copenhagen? Who did he spend his spare time with, and what was he interested in? Do the answers to these questions shed any light on the composer's works or our understanding of his creative purpose? Apart from his own carefully managed autobiographical writing, most of the clues we have to this contextual information lie in the friendships which lasted beyond 1886–87, when the very first surviving documents were written, and in the information that has been gleaned from those records.

John Fellow Larsen tells us that Carl Nielsen went to Copenhagen in the autumn of 1884 in the company of his brother Albert, who would later become a photographer in America. Albert, quoted by Fellow, said that Nielsen buried himself in his studies, so that he had difficulty in pulling his brother away from his books.

We do not know precisely how and when Emil B. Sachs and Carl Nielsen became friends; Sachs, though possessed of cultivated tastes as we find in the letters describing the European tours on which he accompanied Nielsen, was not a musician. The probability is that they met at Nielsen's first lodgings in Copenhagen, with the Rosenberg family (including Vilhelm and his sister Margrethe, who were to remain close friends for life) on Pile Allé.[11] No doubt Sachs' family relationship to one of Carl Nielsen's supporters in Odense, Albert Sachs, played a part in their meeting and helped to establish their friendship.

[9] See CNB 1, pp. 376–77, for an account of Gade's relationship with Brahms.
[10] Fellow, *Vil Herren*…, p. 45–55.
[11] Fellow, *Vil Herren*…, p. 45.

Emil B Sachs was, we also know from John Fellow, cousin to the Brandes brothers, Georg and Edvard, so it seems likely that it was Sachs who will have introduced Nielsen to them and their circle. The Brandes brothers were more than 20 years older than these young students, and it is clear from the surviving letters between Nielsen and Georg Brandes that the age gap, and the respectful distance it required, remained a feature of their acquaintance. But it is also clear that there was a close enough friendship for Brandes to have advised his cousin and young friend when they took an opportunity afforded by Nielsen having won a travel bursary to explore Europe's cultural riches: the itinerary for Nielsen's visits to art galleries in the leading European towns and cities in 1890–91 looks remarkably like that which Brandes himself followed in the 1860s and 70s.[12]

1884 was not just an important year for the young student, Carl Nielsen. It was also the year in which Edvard Brandes, in partnership with Viggo Hørup and Hermann Bing, established the radical newspaper, *Politiken*, after Brandes and Hørup had been dismissed from editorial posts at *Morgenbladet*. It opened for business on 1 October 1884—just as Carl Nielsen arrived in Copenhagen. Hørup became Editor-in-Chief and stayed in that role for 15 years. To add to the drama, Christiansborg, the old royal palace which had become home to the Folketing (Parliament) burned down just two days earlier, on 28 September.

The political tensions in the years preceding 1884 had led to a situation in which the fracture in Danish society—between those who stood to lose what had been theirs for generations, and those who stood to gain from change—had become apparent, and was on the verge of proving really dangerous. The government which had entrenched itself in power that was, in essence, a survival from the (very recent, only 1849) days of autocracy, had battened down the hatches and were doing everything they could to limit the degree to which the newly politicised could gain power. The loss of so much agricultural land to Prussia in 1864 had prompted a quite remarkable level of economic development, and the new men, as well as those living in established rural communities, wanted to see a fairer distribution of resources. The period, though it has clearly had a huge impact on the nature of modern Danish society, has not been given as much attention by Danish historians as equivalently turbulent times have been treated in other European countries: besides

[12] Jørgen Knudsen, *Georg Brandes, Frigørelsens vej, 1842–77.*

Hans Vammen's *Den tomme stat*[13] much of the work available, in *Den store danske, Gyldendals encyclopædi* on-line[14] and in published books including the recent biography, *Edvard Brandes, portræt af en radikal blæksprutte*, is by Kristian Hvidt, upon whose research this summary relies. Writing of Edvard Brandes' thoughts on the turn of the year to 1881, Hvidt says, 'Even the harshest realists have sweet daydreams. But the fight to achieve the great modern breakthrough was just as long, hard and in many ways as ruthless as he expected in his most misanthropic moments, because it was not only on the left wing that the radical powers formed. The radicals on the right also struck up together to exploit all their privileges and economic capacity to stop their opponents.'[15]

Though they had graduated years earlier, both Brandes brothers remained involved in student politics: in 1882, Georg Brandes, but not Edvard, left Studenterforeningen [The Student Society] and formed Studentersamfundet [The Student Association], which Hvidt says 'became a breeding-place for radicalism in Denmark.'[16] The enrichment of the intellectual interaction between faculty and students on a social level which used to characterise academic life in European universities—and which we can find embodied in the life-long engagement with his university of H. C. Ørsted[17]—can be seen in the way the generations interacted in these societies, and in the age range of the social group around which gathered *Politiken* and its senior staff. Kristian Hvidt writes: 'Beyond the political battle, the eighties were also characterised

[13] Hans Vammen, *Den tomme stat, Angst og ansvar i dansk politik 1848–1864*, Copenhagen 2011.

[14] www.denstoredanske.dk/Danmarkshistorien/Det_folkelige_gennembrud/Firsernes_storme/Provisorie %C3 %A5rene/Det_store_provisorium_1885

[15] Kristian Hvidt, *Edvard Brandes, portræt af en radikal blæksprutte*, Copenhagen 2005, p. 156, and see Hvidt's discussion of Brandes in relation to the provisional finance law, the primary cause of the civil breakdown of 1884, pp. 202–203. 'Selv de barskeste realister har søde dagdrømme. Men kampen for at nå det store moderne gennembrud blev netop så lang, hård og på mange måder ubarmhjertig som han ventede i sine mest misantropiske øjeblikke. Det skyldtes, at det ikke alene var på venstrefløjen, at de radikale kræfter samlede sig. Også højres radikale slog sig sammen om at udnytte alle deres privilegier og økonomiske muligheder for at standse modstanderne.'

[16] K. Hvidt, *Edvard Brandes*, p. 214. Niels Krabbe remembers that 'the two students organizations were antagonistic right up to my student days in the 1960s, the former being on the side of the establishment, the latter a radical (later left wing) *Gegenbewegung*.'

[17] Dan Charly Christensen, *Naturens tankelæser. En biografi om Hans Christian Ørsted 1–2*, Copenhagen 2009, English edition, *Hans Christian Ørsted, Reading Nature's Mind*, Oxford 2013, records Ørsted's continuing involvement with student politics throughout his career, so up to 1851; see especially chapter 58 on the years 1848–50, 'Polyteknisk kritik.'

by an economic boom. Especially in the towns it was a time of industrial breakthrough… Besides the crowd of newly enriched wholesalers and master builders who populated "The National" and the other places of entertainment, there also grew a truly Parisian bohemia in Copenhagen, a little group of modern authors and painters, who held themselves away from the clientele of "The Passage," instead seeking out an old-fashioned café in the old town, "Bernina," the little Swiss café on the corner of Badstuestræde and Vimmelskaftet. The little hostelry, which gave its name to a whole epoch in Danish cultural history, became a centre of fashion once the Student Association [Studentersamfundet] had settled in Badstuestræde. Here one might behave in the French way with the lively drinks, absinthe and angostura, which led so many talented artists to go straight to hell.

'So this Copenhagen life was divided between the right and the left, the latter in the axis between 'Bernina' and *Politiken*'s editorial office in Integade. Many merry scandals unfolded here, with challenges to duels and clashes with the militaristic members of the *Livjægerne*.[18] And in the distance sounded a rumbling from the future, the great working class quarter beyond the lakes, where in these years socialism lay down roots and grew strongly.[19]

'As cultural editor of *Politiken*, Edvard Brandes had a central place in this life. He didn't, himself, belong to the group which sipped absinthe at 'Bernina.' He was, like the overwhelming majority of Jews, a "poor drinker," something his brother emphasised strongly in his monograph on "The Modern Breakthrough." But that didn't mean that he was untouched by the decadence that characterised the eighties. On the contrary, after 1884 he developed a circle of close friends who loved "Bernina-culture" and at the same time left their stamp on Edvard.'[20]

[18] I am grateful to Eskil Irminger for this note: *Livjægerne* were organized in 1801, in response to the threat from Perfidious Albion (compare August Bournonville's 'Livjægerne på Amager'). Later (in 1817) it became a rifle club, *Livjægerskydeselskabet*, which is still in existence and soon to celebrate its bicentenary.

[19] Eskil Irminger observes that Hvidt is paraphrasing Holger Drachmann's poem *Engelske Socialister* (1871) here.

[20] K. Hvidt, *Edvard Brandes*, p. 230–31. 'Foruden den politiske kamp prægedes firserne også af en økonomisk højkonjunktur. Navnlig i byerne var det en industriel gennembrudstid… Ved siden af den mængde af ny-rige grosserere og murermestre, der befolkede 'National' og de andre forlystelser, opstod også en sand parisisk boheme i København, en lille gruppe af moderne forfattere og malere, der holdt sig væk fra 'Passagen's' klientel, men søgte en stamkafé i den ældre by, 'Bernina,' den lille schweizerkafé på hjørnet af Badstuestræde og Vimmelskaftet. Denne lille beværtning,

It was to this group that I believe the young Carl Nielsen became attached, through Emil B. Sachs, and that there he met other creative artists with whom he remained friends for the rest of his life. A painting by Erik Ludvig Henningsen dating from 1910[21] shows a circle of friends around the Brandes brothers at a reading of J. P. Jacobsen's *Pesten i Bergamo* on 1 March 1882. Those represented include, sitting: Erik Skram, Georg Brandes, Sophus Schandorph, Holger Drachmann, Edvard Brandes, Viggo Johansen, August Jerndorff, Herman Trier, J. P. Jacobsen, P. S. Krøyer, Karl Madsen, Pietro Krohn, Kristian Zahrtmann, and standing, F. Hendriksen, Karl Gjellerup, Otto Borchsenius, Hans Nic. Hansen, Martinus Galschiøt, Laurits Tuxen, Harald Høffding and Michael Ancher. The mixture of ages in the group shown in the painting is clear enough, and although not all of these names will be familiar to Nielsen scholars, they will recognise that of the artist Hans Nicolai Hansen, Nielsen's principal guide to paintings on his early European tours, and those of the group of artists associated with Skagen, including P. S. Krøyer and Michael Ancher, with whom Nielsen kept in touch.

Jørgen Knudsen's enormous biographical study of Georg Brandes finds disappointingly little room for discussion of his connections and influence in the world of the arts, but a little chapter in the final volumes, *Uovervindelig taber*, 'Thorvaldsen, eller Kan lidenskab være sømmelig,' includes a list of some of the artists with whom Brandes maintained long acquaintanceships. As well as many of those portrayed in Henningsen's painting, we find Vilhelm Bissen, the Slott-Møllers, Lorenz Frölich,

der gav navn til en hel epoke i dansk kulturhistorie, var blevet et mødecenter, efter at Studentersamfundet havde fået lokaler i Badstuestræde. Her dyrkede man også det fransk-prægede, nemlig de livlige drikke, Absinth og Angostura, som førte så mange talentfulde kunstnere lige lukt ned i fortabelsen.

'Dette københavnerliv havde altså sin deling i et højre og et venstre, sidstnævnte i aksen mellem 'Bernina' og *Politiken*'s redaktion i Integade. Mange muntre skandaler udfoldede sig her med udfordringer til duel og sammenstød med de militaristiske medlemmer af livjægerne. Og i det fjerne lød bulderet fra fremtiden, de store arbejderkvarterer hinsides Søerne, hvor socialismen i disse år groede og voksede sig stærk. Som kulturredaktør på *Politiken* fik Edvard Brandes en central placering i dette leben. Selv hørte han ikke til dem, der nippede til absintherne på 'Bernina.' Han var ligesom det helt overvældende flertal af jøder en 'dårlig drikker,' noget hans bro betonede stærkt i sin afhandling i 'Det moderne gennembrud.' Men det betød ikke, at han var upåvirket af den dekadence, der prægede firserne. Tværtimod fik han efter 1884 en kreds af nære venner, som elskede 'Berninakuturen' og samtidig satte deres præg på Edvard.'

[21] Det Nationalhistorisk Museum på Frederiksberg Slot, reproduced in *En sejlbåd for vindstille, en biografi om J. P. Jacobsen*, Kristian Himmelstrup, Copenhagen 2014, p. 241.

Vilhelm Hammershøi and the German artist, Max Klinger, to whom Brandes wrote, on Nielsen's request, a letter of introduction. Frustratingly, the only reference to Nielsen in Knudsen's biography of Georg Brandes recounts an incident in the 1920s, and makes no reference to their long connection.[22] It seems likely that Nielsen met the artist Jens Ferdinand Willumsen through this group. Although it has not been possible to establish this with certainty, it seems clear from the casual references to Willumsen in Nielsen's diary entries from April 1891, when both were in Paris (with Hans Nicolai Hansen) for the Independent Exhibition at which Willumsen and possibly Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen exhibited, that they were already good friends by then.[23] Hammershøi did not travel to Paris until September 1891, but he was one of a group of artists, including Willumsen, Agnes and Harald Slott-Møller and Johan Rohde, who had signed a declaration in January 1891 that they would no longer submit their work for exhibition at the Copenhagen Academy's official exhibition at the Charlottenborg; the charter they signed led to the establishment of the Free Exhibitions in Copenhagen, to which all these artists contributed in the following years.[24]

The atmosphere of political chaos in Copenhagen intensified after Nielsen's arrival, with the passing of yet another provisional finance law in April 1885 and the fracture within the 'Venstre' party (between moderates and radicals). There was a harsh crackdown, including the banning of shooting clubs and the establishment of a special police force to deal with civic strife ('propagandist excesses'[25]) in and beyond Copenhagen, for example in Ribe.[26] Then on 21 October 1885, a young typographer attempted to shoot the State Minister, J. B. S. Estrup. The bullet was deflected by a jacket button and Estrup was unharmed, but these were far from peaceful times.

[22] Jørgen Knudsen, *Georg Brandes: Uoverindelig taber 1914–27*, Copenhagen 2004, p. 71.

[23] J. Fellow, CNB 1, p. 221. There is no record of Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen's entry in the Paris Independent Exhibition in *Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen, en registrant over billedhuggerens værker*, Odense 2010, only her contribution to the Paris World Exhibition in the previous year, p. 366–67.

[24] Poul Vad, *Vilhelm Hammershøi and Danish Art at the Turn of the Century*, New Haven and London 1992, p. 95. See Colin Roth, 'Carl Nielsen and the Danish Tradition of Story-Telling' in *Carl Nielsen Studies 4*, Copenhagen 2009, pp. 164–85, for an account of Carl Nielsen's friendship with the Hammershøis.

[25] 'Agitatoriske udskejelser,' Kristian Hvidt, www.denstoredanske.dk/~/Det_store_provisorium_1885.

[26] Kristian Hvidt, www.denstoredanske.dk/~/Det_store_provisorium_1885.

Edvard Brandes was not directly involved in this political and social unrest: Kristian Hvidt argues that, 'he dreamt of intellectual radicalism like in France, of the victory of science over religion, of his brother's literary message and of his and Georg's lifting to the status of cultural-political prophets.'[27] We may safely assume that this focus on intellectual and cultural aspirations was shared by the social group we have been describing, including its young adherents—but in times like these, everyone who stands apart from the official norm is a potential threat, and an object of suspicion. We should note the Francophile slant of the Brandes' circle; it was no accident that so many of the young artists attached to it were encouraged to think travelling to and studying in Paris, and exhibiting there.[28]

I have not been able to discover what Carl's brother Albert was doing in Copenhagen, nor whether whatever he was doing was connected to the political forment; but his decision to emigrate to the United States *might* be a clue that things may have seemed safer in the New World. We do not know whether any of Nielsen's family or contacts in Odense were involved in any of the disturbances which the new police sought to control, or whether any of the Nielsens were subject to investigation. But we know that the police will have used the investigative methods common to all such forces, opening letters and reading correspondence. And we can see from Carl Nielsen's links as evidenced by his later friendships, which *are* recorded in the *Carl Nielsen Brevudgaven*, that he had at the very least social links to some of the people who will have been under surveillance, under suspicion. So even without actually *knowing* that any of the Nielsen family were involved in the unrest of those years, it does not seem unreasonable to speculate that the Nielsen family may have agreed not to write to each other, or to destroy any letters between them that were sent, in order to protect one or another of the family network (which includes their friends, a very wide-ranging group from working families to the contacts made through Klaus Berntsen in establishing financial support for Carl's stay in Copenhagen) from even the slightest risk of prosecution.

It seems improbable to suppose that not a single letter or message was composed in the first six years that Nielsen lived in Copenhagen,

[27] Kristian Hvidt, *Edvard Brandes*, p. 203. 'Han drømte om intellektuel radikalisme ligesom i Frankrig, om videnskabens sejr over religionen, om broderens litterære budskaber og om sin og Georgs ophøjelse til kulturpolitiske profeter.'

[28] Both Carl Nielsen and Vilhelm Hammershøi went to Paris in 1891: Nielsen married there in April, and the Hammershøis spent their honeymoon there in October.

and the vagaries of his romantic life cannot explain the silence: we are clearly not dealing with a situation in which all the material from these years was destroyed because of the risk of embarrassment to the people involved, nor a situation in which every single thing could have been lost by accident. There must have been a 'clean up' or a controlled system of communication that left no trace — and Nielsen's proximity to some of the key players in the political drama of these years provides a better 'provisional' explanation than any other.

What can life have felt like, for a young man propelled into such wild activity, such excitement and intensity? Even though Odense was by no means the rural idyll painted in *Min fynske barndom* (his funding by men running factories making soap, cycles and sewing machines, as well as a range of other commercial and industrial activities, gives the lie to that pastoral fantasy), the transition to the centre of 'great times,' and to engagement with those at the centre of the turmoil, must have enhanced the young Nielsen's sense that with energy and a sense of purpose, an idea of what needed to be done, the individual was capable of great achievements. He had a model of this idea in Edvard Brandes, whose determination to bring change to 'little Denmark,' to break through and bring it into the modern world, is regularly expressed in the letters and notes he wrote to his brother Georg in Berlin.[29] That these times influenced the young musician enormously is beyond question: to take a single example that can be documented, it can only have been through these acquaintances that Nielsen came across a section of Søren Kierkegaard's *Enten/Eller*, not just the words but the ideas, gradually transforming them creatively into what was to become his fourth 'inextinguishable' symphony, and to write about them then in words that are still recognisably Kierkegaard's.[30]

We may not find very much more evidence about Nielsen's student years, and are very unlikely ever to be able to piece together a day-to-day

[29] See K. Hvidt, *Edvard Brandes*, 'For fuld fart ind i firserne, 1881–85,' pp. 155–226.

[30] See C.Roth, 'Carl Nielsen's Cultural Self-Education, His Engagement with Fine Art and Ideas and the Path towards *Hymnus Amoris*,' in *Carl Nielsen Studies 5*, Copenhagen 2012, pp. 302–327. Georg Brandes wrote the first biographical study of Kierkegaard in 1877, and seems likely to have been the source of Carl Nielsen's knowledge of the philosopher's work. Kierkegaard's words may be found in Danish in *Enten — Eller, første del*, vol. 2 of *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, Copenhagen 1997, p. 77. In English, see *Either/Or*, trans. and ed. H. and E. Hong, vol. 1, p. 55. Nielsen's reworking, concluding with the words, 'Musik *er* Liv, som dette uudslukkeligt' ['Music IS life, and as such is inextinguishable'], appeared on 1.2.1916 as a note for the 'Inextinguishable,' see J. Fellow, ed., *Carl Nielsen i sin tid*, vol. 1, pp. 194–95.

account of his silent years, so we will probably never be able to answer all of the questions we began with. But it is my contention that Carl Nielsen's natural inclination to be radical — that is, to aim directly for success, artistic and emotional, to speak plainly in doing so in order to be understood, and to place more emphasis on content than on style — was enhanced by this early exposure to political, or rather intellectual, radicalism, and especially to Edvard Brandes. Whether there is a case for characterising Brandes' cultural and social ambitions, his determined personality, as 'Jewish,' is a matter for separate discussion. But where much of the social pressure on individuals in 'normal' Grundtvigian Danish society is to conform, to work together with peers in the pursuit of common goals, the personalities of both Brandes brothers was, rather, to aspire. They placed greater priority on achieving as much as possible than on fitting in, and this priority is echoed in Carl Nielsen's perpetual drive to change, to transform, to discover the new. It is this energy, this vigour, that is typical of Nielsen — and I believe he learned it in these Copenhagen years, transforming his acquaintances' political and social ambition into his own musical and cultural radicalism, born of incredibly hard work, and a tight focus on expressive purpose. It is this intensity that has made Carl Nielsen one of his period's, and Denmark's, most remarkable composers — and it is impossible to understand how it developed in him without seeing his music in the context of his life and experience.[31]

[31] The material on which this article is based was prepared for a lecture celebrating the 150th anniversary of Carl Nielsen's birth, given for the Centre for Nordic Studies at the University of Sheffield on 17 March 2015.