

S. A. J. Bradley, *N. F. S. Grundtvig: A life recalled*

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S. A. J. Bradley, *N. F. S. Grundtvig: A life recalled. An anthology of biographical source-texts translated from the Danish*. Aarhus Universitetsforlag, Aarhus 2008, 597 p.

I. Background

Those who know little about Denmark may know it for its tasty herrings, unparalleled hospitality and unforgettable long summer evenings at Tivoli. The fortunate foreigners who have been able to dig deeper into Danish traditions can tell you that this small country has frequently produced men and women of large stature: the physicist Niels Bohr, the composer Carl Nielsen, the novelist Karen Blixen, the author of fairy tales Hans Christian Andersen. Yet it is a sad fact that one of the major figures in Danish literature, theology, history and education has remained well into the first decade of the 21st century virtually unknown outside his own native country. It is even more a pity, because a retrospective view of his work suggests that the ideas, the passions and even the life-course of his own personal biography all raise issues that have relevance far beyond the Danish cultural environment in which his life was lived. The man, of course, is Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872).

Beginning in 1990, the Centre for Grundtvig Studies at the University of Aarhus has committed itself to a timely, ongoing and much-needed reassessment of the Grundtvig legacy. A central part of its task has been to respond to the deeply felt interest in Grundtvig's life expressed by those all over the world – scholars and educators in India, Africa, Eastern Europe, North and South America – who want to know who Grundtvig was and what he wrote, but have been sorely limited by the lack of English translations of his work. It has taken a long time, but at last a major work has appeared that should fill much of that gap. Authored by the English Anglo-Saxonist scholar S. A. J. Bradley, this volume *N. F. S. Grundtvig: A life recalled* (2008) is truly a pleasure to behold. On the cover, courtesy of the *Hirschsprungske Samling*, appears an exquisite colour reproduction drawn from life, *N. F. S. Grundtvig, 1843* by the Danish artist C. A. Jensen. Wearing the distinctive white round clerical collar with a single medallion (the Order of Dannebrog) on his chest, a mature Grundtvig at sixty years of

age looks out at us. The expression on his face is at once calm and rooted, but at the same time penetrating and implacable, the fine features drawn by the artist not at all masking the extraordinary intensity of his timeless gaze, rooted in the unparalleled intensity of a searching spirit that guided and impelled him throughout his life, resulting in achievements and outpourings that at times could both delight and shock his contemporaries. This is perhaps what is hinted at in the amused witticism of one contemporary, King Frederik the Sixth: "Grundtvig is a fire-spouting mountain" (Bradley, 166).

Frederik VI, who played a major role in Grundtvig's unfolding, achieved power while still Crown Prince by a *coup d'état* in 1784 (when Grundtvig was one year old), formally succeeded his insane father to the throne in 1808, and ruled until his death in 1839 (when Grundtvig was fifty-six). Grundtvig's relationship with this "incomparably accessible absolute monarch" (Grundtvig; Bradley, 111) and with subsequent Danish kings and members of the royal family is but one of the multiple threads of Grundtvig's life and relationships that Professor Bradley has expertly sifted through and woven into the collection. The anthology provides a rich sample of Grundtvig's own writings over a long and productive lifetime of eighty-nine years; he is allowed to tell the story by presenting the narrative in his own words. But this anthology also includes the writings of those who knew him: the thoughts of friends, followers, family members and even some of his formidable opponents (not the least of whom is the great existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, whose brief lifespan of forty-two years is sandwiched between the years of Grundtvig's youthful and mature adulthood. Kierkegaard was born in 1813 when Grundtvig was only thirty; he died in 1855 when Grundtvig was seventy-two, with seventeen more active years of life remaining.

Professor Bradley's book is more than just good; it is a masterpiece. I want to make clear at the outset of this review that in my opinion a copy of this book belongs in every University Library. This volume with its rich interweaving of themes and perspectives makes available to interested readers the most extensive collection of Grundtvig's writings yet to appear in English. It is, as the author notes at the outset, a work of translation, not of editing primary source material. Its focus is on prose texts, although selections from Grundtvig's poetry and hymns are gratefully scattered throughout the volume. In acknowledgment of Grundtvig's dedication to his mother tongue, many key Danish terms are preserved in the text alongside their English translation. Moreover, running page references, shown in

square brackets, make it possible for any reader to consult and closely follow the original Danish texts with the aid of the translation.

The Foreword and Introduction are followed by “A Selection of Significant Dates, 1783-1872,” which provides a useful tool for any reader who wishes to gain a quick overview both of Grundtvig’s life and of the major historical events that took place during his lifetime. Thus, for example, we learn that in 1786, when Grundtvig was only three, Count Ditlev Reventlow and the Norwegian jurist Christian Colbiørnsen convinced the then Crown Prince Frederik to set up the major commission on agricultural reform that would soon enact the four major Danish Land Reforms.¹ A half century later it was the children and grandchildren of farmers freed by these Land Reforms who would answer Grundtvig’s call for a new kind of school and breathe into life the Danish folkhighschool, the first of which appeared in 1844.

Extensive quotations of the original Danish text are found side by side with their English translations in many of the selections that fill the three main sections of the volume. This strategy of making available the original Danish text in Grundtvig’s often unique, always idiosyncratic, and occasionally astonishing use of the Danish language provides an added dimension of authenticity to the English translations. In my judgment it does much to facilitate the reading experience of both Danish-speaking and non-Danish-speaking readers.

The text of the anthology is organized as follows: Part one deals with “Grundtvig’s memoirs” (these are writings authored by Grundtvig himself); Part two provides “Memoirs of Grundtvig” (these are writings authored by his contemporaries); and Part three provides an extensive “Index.” Listed in alphabetical order, each technical term, place, or name of interest is followed by a sequential listing of the pages on which it is found through the entire volume. The item treated is then given a deeper explanation that can range from a few sentences or paragraphs to longer than a page (for instance the concentrated and very helpful elaboration for “folkhighschools” extends well over a single page). It is the combined presence of these three parts of the book that should make this volume the standard reference work in the field.

¹ The four major reforms include the provision of secure rights to tenant farmers (1787); the liberation of tenant farmers from forced residence on the estate of their birth (1788); the formalization and control of the forced work requirement (1791 and 1799); and the fundamental reorganization of agricultural land use and residence patterns (1776, 1781). The English language reader is referred to Borish 1991, 113-147 for an extended discussion.

Part one (Grundtvig's memoirs) is organized from a biographical perspective so that all of its selections, each useful when taken by itself, when taken together end up providing an excellent chronology of Grundtvig's life. One can read what he wrote not only in his early years, but follow his spiralling, often chaotic development through the many differentiated stages of mature adult life and his eventual passage into elderhood as a living icon of Danish culture. To give a useful overview: an initial section on his early years (from events of childhood to matriculation, 1800) is followed by student years in Copenhagen, the tutorship experience in Egeløkke (1805-1808), his probational sermon and Christian breakthrough (1810), two glimpses from 1812-14 (touching on his relationship with his father, and the forced cession of Norway to Sweden), the "seven lean years" (1813-1820), retrospect and new ferment (1824), the visits to England (1829-1831), the visit to Norway (1851), and reflections upon the church (1871).

II. A life recalled: the first fifty years

Born in the town of Udby in Sjælland in September 1783, the son of the parish priest, Grundtvig is sent away for his primary education with the parish priest of Thyregod, Jutland in 1792. In 1798, reaching confirmation age, he is admitted to the Latin School in Aarhus (Cathedral School). He matriculates in 1800, and is admitted to the University of Copenhagen to read theology. In the section on childhood and early youth, we learn that in November 1802 the nineteen-year-old Grundtvig begins an activity that will be continued for the rest of his life: he systematically, tirelessly and relentlessly commits his thoughts and emotions to paper. He begins by keeping a diary prefaced with a review of his own life to date; it is all written in the third person.

Evidence of a questioning spirit appears early, as when he writes of himself, "Frederik could not understand why God created human-kind when he foresaw its fall" (Bradley, 69). He will later refer to the Cathedral School in Aarhus as "that witch-cursed Latin school" and remark that

however our Latin schools might be now, the one I went to was so dull, so empty and boring that I either had to run away from it the day after my arrival or learn to be ashamed of my love of history as a whole and of the fatherland's in particular, indeed of every flicker of spirit and every spark of holy fire that yet existed in me (Bradley, 81).

These schools encourage a type of learning that Grundtvig disparagingly refers to as "boy scholarship" [*drenge-videnskabelighed*]

which is “a pestilence to the intellect.” He writes that “it was also a dreadful blindness in our naïve fathers, who threw us, at the most unstable and dangerous age, into a sphere so hostile to everything natural and living in a loftier sense, so devoid of everything that ennobles, so full of everything that can debase, deaden and deprave a person.” He reflects that there is a strong connection between this failure in foundational learning and the “intellectual torpor and impotence” he discovers at the university (Bradley, 82).

Yet Grundtvig’s evaluation of the early years of his education is not all negative. He writes of his earlier six years at Thyregod Parsonage:

the yearly summer-journeys to Udby sustained not only my active connection with the region of my birth and my parental home but widened my field of vision and enlivened my thinking, so that I would wish for all boys in their adolescence such inland journeys both by land and water, as the best means to that universalism [*Universalisme*] in the home and the mother-tongue which in my view is all, at that age, one should either demand or desire of them (Bradley, 73).

When he comes to the capital city of Copenhagen, he sees that he is quite able to compete in the world of academic studies, but still feels himself very much the provincial outsider. As he writes in the *Diary* (1804):

Here you find a person, seventeen years old, who through eight years’ dwelling in *Jydepot-land* [*i.e.*, Jutland] has gathered that knowledge which is required for Academia, whose intellect cannot exactly be called entirely uncultivated and who has acquired an interest in and a passion for the fine arts, but you will also find a person void of all that outward culturedness which everywhere commends one but which especially in Copenhagen families cannot be dispensed with by anyone who is to be acceptable (Bradley, 77).

His scholarly achievements are only half-heartedly recognized by the University examiners; even three decades later he will remember with considerable unhappiness his mixed examination results and the final overall classification of *haud illaudabilis* (“not uncommendable”) he receives for studies in History, Greek and Latin.

It is clear from reading the biographical material that whatever his results on the formal examinations, Grundtvig’s real education was going quite well. By “real education” I mean not the mere acquisition of outward forms of knowledge, the kind that can be memorized for repetition in a standardized test and then quickly forgotten. I am referring to something quite different: an inner growth and the development of a deep love of learning, neither of which can be easily measured by an external examiner. This deep reverence for inner

learning would serve him well over the course of his entire lifetime, and would be at the heart of his own influential writings on the true purpose and scope of education. Writing much later of this period, he would recall it as “a stroke of luck that my love of the history of the North awoke again at that time and my real acquaintance with the old gods and heroes of the North was established” (Bradley, 83).

The lectures of Henrik Steffens in 1802 were an important milestone in his development. They gave him an introduction to German Romanticism, and much else, including an “evaluation of the famous authors, the praise of Shakespeare and Cervantes, Goethe, Tieck and Novalis, whom I did not know at all.” He could cheerfully identify with Steffens’ critical comments on what had taken place on the local scene: “Steffens straightaway gave a good drubbing to most of what, here at home, was called high poesy, and which I myself had found deeply dreary” (Bradley, 85). He seems to have entered a period in which due to his other preoccupations – including the reading of poetry and novels – he did not read much theology, even though his final exams are approaching. He meets his future wife, Elizabeth Blicher, at the age of twenty-one, and contemplates engagement. Yet the dreamer shows a practical side: without a source of income, as much as he is drawn to her and to the prospect of marriage, “it seemed to me to be utterly crazy to engage oneself to a penniless girl at my age and with my prospects” (Bradley, 91).

At this point, deeply worried about his future and his finances, he receives in 1805 what seems like a bit of unmitigated good fortune, but it turns out to be one of the great shocks of his life. The youthful, university-educated Grundtvig has become at the age of twenty-two a precocious talented scholar. He prides himself on being the supreme rationalist who regards love, in his own words, as “a fool’s game (...) I thought that none but weak-headed folk could have that feeling in any degree” (Bradley, 93). But soon after accepting in 1805 a paid position as the resident tutor at the manor of Egeløkke, Langeland, what happens? He finds that he has fallen deeply and uncontrollably in love with Constance Leth, the mother of his pupil. As he writes in his diary:

I came here. I read into the fair woman’s eyes and what were all the world’s books to this? What could I get to know in those that were as dear to me as the sight of her glance resting with tenderness upon me? What were reading and talking against silent gazing upon the fair one? – it is as the dim lamp against the streaming sun. (...) O fool that I am who with an impotent word, a feeble will, thought myself able to dam that ocean from which drops of love ... (Bradley, 93-94).

Ten pages are missing from the diary at this point. There has been much speculation both as to their content and the reason why they are missing.

One of the most useful features of this volume is Professor Bradley's ability to add his own voice to that of Grundtvig and his contemporaries. His often sardonic comments add valuable perspective and insight to the historical words of the translated text. Here, even in the midst of the broken heart that drives Grundtvig to dramatic words posing the possibility of his own insanity and madness, Professor Bradley's comment brings us back to earth:

it is clear from the notebooks' judicious reflections upon the theory and practice of teaching his pupil that talk of insanity was rather a flirtation with literary rhetoric than confession of a serious fear (Bradley, 94).

Indeed, Grundtvig's sad meditations on his broken heart are thoughtfully punctuated with sudden flashes of insight about the teaching experience: "Had I not fallen in love, my pupil would not have got so far" (Bradley, 95). For three years (1805-1808) he remains in this position as resident tutor before eventually moving back to the settled, hierarchical church world of Copenhagen in 1810. His narrow belief in the supreme efficacy of book learning and scholastic rationality will never be the same after this descent into the maelstrom of passionate love and the overpowering emotions that accompany it.

Once in Copenhagen, he agrees to return to Udby to assist his aged father as curate. In order to do this, he must qualify for ordination by preaching a sermon before an official censor, which he does on March 17, 1810. The sermon is evaluated as having achieved distinction, but what Grundtvig does next reveals a pattern that, though varied in its manifestations, will appear more than once in his life. 1) *Authority is publicly challenged*: Grundtvig, on his own initiative, publishes his probational sermon under the provocative title "Why has the word of the Lord vanished from his house?" 2) *Authority reacts strongly and negatively*: Six Copenhagen clerics quickly lodge a formal complaint to the Chancellery that Grundtvig has engaged in libel and defamation against the clergy. 3) *Grundtvig expresses astonishment and consternation at the unfairness of the reaction*:

my close friends (...) know how far it was from my thoughts to cause a stir, namely, with my probational sermon (...) if my accusers had known me they would surely not have taken offence over a piece of work which, as such, was in my eyes the most insignificant I had written (Bradley, 102).

4) Grundtvig has episodes that have variously been described as “manic-depressive,” “mental illness,” “depression,” “possession by spirits,” and so on. In the autumn of 1810, following the above events, Grundtvig is seen by colleagues at Valkendorfs Kollegium behaving strangely at Holy Communion. He throws himself on his knees, weeping at the altar, by-passing the Communion line. People say that he has gone mad. He often sits staring at one spot, and breaks off conversations sobbing. Later in December, his friends are alarmed when one morning he simply remains lying in bed. An uncle is called, who tells his friends that Grundtvig lies abed not in sickness but in an inward struggle for his soul’s salvation. Not knowing what to do, his colleague and friend decides to go with him to his old father in Udby. When they overnight in an inn in a town along the way, the friend is awoken: “far into the night I awoke: Grundtvig was down on his knees in a corner of the room and was praying with such a loud voice it must surely attract attention in the house. I tried to calm him down but it went on for a long time.” When they travel together down to Udby the next day, he writes: “On the way, Grundtvig told me that he had felt the Devil as a serpent twisting itself about his body” (Bradley, 186).

When they arrive, Grundtvig’s father, learning of Grundtvig’s condition, quickly composes himself and remarks only that his son is suffering from religious “doubts” [*anfægtelser*]. Professor Bradley’s succinct interpretation goes further. He remarks of Grundtvig’s behaviour on this and other occasions that it includes

vivid and overwhelming hallucinations expressed in a religious idiom and no doubt reflecting, albeit with dramatic exaggeration, his daily conceptualization of a world under God’s providence and his own doubts, calling, mission and struggle within it (Bradley, 186).

During the “seven lean years” (1813-1820) that follow, Grundtvig somehow survives without official appointment to a church position or a fixed income. During these years, his fierce energy is focused on three major medieval works: Saxo’s History of the Danes, Snorri’s History of the Norse kings, and the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*. Not content with these tasks of study and translation, he single-handedly publishes his own periodical *Danne-Virke* (1816-1819). Because he received no other contributions, the first two volumes were written in their entirety by Grundtvig himself.

One would think that the clever thing for a young man in Grundtvig’s position to do would be to quietly to bury himself in these fruitful activities and wait for the controversy over his probationary sermon to fade out of memory. Grundtvig, however, does exactly the opposite. He cannot resist engaging in what Professor Bradley describes as an “excessively abrasive public dispute” (Bradley, 110)

with the venerable State Archivist over the latter's writings about *Beowulf*. This dispute does not help his prospects of finding employment in the church. In the Spring of 1818, the King – taking due note both of Grundtvig's hardship and of the additional task he has taken on of translating the folk-chronicles of the North – grants him an annual honorarium. Buoyed by the King's support, Grundtvig at last is able to marry Lise Blicher (the couple had by then been engaged for seven years). In 1822 a first son, Johan, is born; the birth of a second son, Svend, follows in 1824.

Grundtvig's translations of Saxo and Snorri appear at last (1819-1822), and although they do not receive the recognition Grundtvig hoped for, other good things seem to be happening for him. In 1821 he receives a pastoral appointment to the rural parish of Præstø in southern Sjælland. The next year he is granted something he had long wished for that always seemed out of his reach: he is appointed as curate at Vor Frelzers Kirke in Copenhagen. Given the opportunity to preach from his own pulpit both in Præstø and then in Vor Frelzers Kirke in Copenhagen, he is himself spiritually revitalized. He publishes in 1824 a major new work *Nyaars-Morgen* (New Year's Morning). Bradley describes it as a remarkable and lengthy poetic expression that

is visionary, at times mystical, sometimes in tone and spirit reminiscent of the more consolatory prophets of the Old Testament uttering their glimpsed revelations to the chosen people of God, complex to the point of obscurity in its abundant metaphorical idiom (Bradley, 123).

He goes on to point out that Grundtvig here and elsewhere uses the term *Nyaar* to mean not just the start of a new calendar year, but the dawning of a new age. In 1824 he is already forty-one years of age, a married man with two young children and family responsibilities who appears to be on the way to a more settled and mainstream lifestyle after his youthful attempts to take on the church establishment. Are Grundtvig's impassioned tirades against church authority a form of youthful indiscretion that he is about to outgrow? Can the bright New Age he has foreseen in his work be just above the horizon??

There are certainly grounds to hope this is the case, but then in 1825 Professor H. N. Clausen publishes his *Constitution, Doctrine and Ritual in Catholicism and Protestantism*, a large and learned work on the meaning of ritual in Christian thought. It espouses a strongly rationalistic view of Christianity which turns out to be too much for Grundtvig to bear. We see once again the same pattern that accompanied his probational sermon: 1) *Authority is publicly challenged*: Less than two weeks later a 47-page pamphlet appears

bearing an immodest title: “*The Church’s Retort to Professor of Theology Dr. H. N. Clausen by Nik. Fred. Sev. Grundtvig, Curate of the Church of Our Saviour.*” Clausen, writes Grundtvig (boldly claiming to speak for the church itself), has spread false doctrine, must acknowledge his error and repent, or else resign from office. 2) *Authority reacts strongly and negatively*: Instead of the public debate Grundtvig anticipates, Professor Clausen sues for libel. Grundtvig is dragged into court and loses the case. His charges against Clausen are found to be offensive, baseless and void. He is fined, must pay all court costs, and (adding injury to insult) is placed under lifelong censorship. 3) *Grundtvig expresses astonishment and consternation at the unfairness of the reaction*. Writing about himself in the third person, in an autobiographical sketch, he comments:

in connection with his prosecution for *Kirkens Gjenmæle* [*The Church’s Retort*] (1826) he resigned his office and on the same occasion came under police censorship, the grievousness of which, *even for the most unoffending writers*, he, from ten years experience, thoroughly got to know (Bradley, 62; italics added).

4) The fourth pattern, *Grundtvig has episodes sometimes described as “manic-depressive,” “mental illness,” “depression,” “possession by spirits,” and so on* will not be seen in connection with these events of 1825-26 (though later episodes of behaviours that give rise to these labels occur in 1844 and 1867). By these later dates the term *Grundtvigianer* (“follower of Grundtvig”) has entered the Danish language. As one might expect, different and contrasting reactions to Grundtvig’s sometimes exceedingly odd behaviour are made by followers and opponents. These later events and a continuum of reactions to them are well-documented in this anthology (especially in Part two: *Memoirs of Grundtvig*).

It is a testament to Grundtvig’s resilience and determination that no incapacitating feelings or emotional events seem to surface in these years. One clue to this may be in the fact that Grundtvig is now a family man, with a brand-new daughter, Meta, born in 1827: he is responsible for the support of a wife and three young children. As an ambitious writer, he has not only been publicly humiliated but placed under lifelong police censorship.² (The censorship order of 1826 required him to submit all intended publication for police scrutiny and obtain an official stamp of approval before it could be published). As a committed minister, he has spoken out against what he considered unfair treatment by the court and the church authorities. As if this is

² This decree of lifelong censorship would be lifted just over ten years later, in 1837.

not enough, a decision he is about to make will render his situation even more untenable. Against the advice of at least one Bishop he thinks about resigning his church position in Copenhagen. To do so would mean giving up his only source of livelihood. When the whole matter is set before the King, Grundtvig receives this sober answer: the King tells him, "I can do nothing about it. I have stood by you as long as I could" (Bradley, 170). The King's answer, Grundtvig tells us, determines the issue for him. He promptly resigns his church position.

Grundtvig is now out of favour with nearly everyone. Even his admirer and patron the King of Denmark will not take his side in his dispute with Clausen. His prospects for obtaining another position are now non-existent. What does he do?

It was in the year 1828, when I was standing, so to speak, idle in the market place, that King Frederik the Sixth on one occasion asked me what I was working upon and I answered: Nothing, your Majesty! and I really do not know what to do at the moment, unless it might please his Majesty to let me travel to England and examine the Anglo-Saxon manuscripts more closely, which are also of great importance for the illumination of Denmark's antiquity but are entirely disregarded in their homeland (Bradley, 133).

As a result of this eloquent statement of purpose and his prior record of scholarly accomplishment in the translation of ancient texts, Grundtvig receives a royal grant which enables him to visit England over three successive summers (1829-1831). Bradley comments that "his encounter with England and English culture, both ancient and modern, proved to be of very great consequence to him and to his country" (Bradley, 129). In the years after his return, Grundtvig begins to write about "The Living Word" and fresh insights into the true goals of education (such as "people's enlightenment") in his *Nordic Mythology* (1832), *The Danish Four-Leaf Clover* (1836) and *The School for Life* (1838). Many of his fellow countrymen are not only ready to listen to what he has to say: some of them will spend their lives working tirelessly to bring his visionary ideas into living practice.

III. Individuation, generativity and the theory of the psychosocial moratorium: a life history perspective on Grundtvig

A. Grundtvig and Luther: The psychosocial moratorium

One enduring element of Grundtvig's views on major church figures is that both in his youth and his mature adulthood he expressed a great admiration and respect for Martin Luther (1483-1546). In fact, Vol. III

of his *Danne-Virke* contains a remarkable jubilee-year song to Luther's memory (Bradley. 164). Keep in mind that the following lines were written as a young man:

<p>Ja, o <i>Luther!</i> vil i Blinde Dine Fodspor trindt man sky, Altid skal dog en Kjærminde For dig gro i Bøge-Ly, Gro, til sidste Bøg henvisner, Sidste Dane-Hjerte isner: Med Guds Hjælp, til Domme-Dag.</p>	<p>Yea, O <i>Luther!</i> if, in blindness, widely men your footsteps shun, yet forget-me-not shall ever bloom for you in beechwood shade, bloom until the last beech withers, the last Danish heart grows icy: with God's help, to Judgement Day.</p>
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These lines become all the more poignant when one remembers that the stately beech tree is the national tree of Denmark, and the small, blue forget-me-not is one of its favourite Spring flowers. The young Grundtvig could not have chosen a more apt use of symbol and metaphor to make his points to a Danish audience.

More than a quarter-century later on May 1, 1844, an older Grundtvig delivered an important sermon at Vartov Church (to which he had been appointed in 1839, effectively ending his isolation from the pulpit). Grundtvig had by then already become a significant figure on the national scene. It was in that same year 1844 that the first actual folkhighschool, inspired by his writings, would appear. But in the Spring of 1844 Grundtvig had become ill with the mumps, was suffering from extreme stress of all the burdens he had taken on, and was saddened by the death of his older brother Otto, the last remaining sibling. He was so weakened and melancholic that he imagined in writing this sermon that his own death might be drawing close upon him.

This would turn out to be far from Grundtvig's farewell sermon. He would recover after a lengthy period of convalescence, and by July would go on to stir a huge open-air audience with a memorable address on the Slesvig issue. Returning in good health to the pulpit, he would preach additional sermons for nearly thirty years more. Yet the Vartov Sermon, dedicated as was his custom "In Jesus' Name", is of special importance because it was written when he thought he might soon be taking leave of his congregation for the next world. In it, he wanted to make sure that he provided for his congregation in this world the deepest core he could find of his wisdom and insights to tide them over in case he was no longer there to guide them. I cite the following noteworthy lines at length because they eloquently express his deep personal indebtedness to the teachings of Martin Luther:

I was glad as one that finds a great treasure – yes, as that merchant who sought after genuine pearls and found one so precious that he sold all that he had and bought it – when, in Martin Luther’s *Catechism*, in the Christians’ three age-old declarations of belief and instruction for children, and above all in the communal profession of the Creed at Baptism, I found the sole Word of God which *all* Christians have heard and with one voice professed, that Word of God which all Christians must believe and profess and by it be justified and saved; for now I could clarify it both for myself and for the congregation that it was not myself but the Lord Jesus Christ whom I proclaimed; not my own invention or my own bookish knowledge and bookish cleverness or my own inward feelings and experiencings that I call God’s Word which is mighty in the saving of souls, but that it is a communal Word of belief from the mouth of the holy apostles, heard and professed over the whole of Christendom – hidden maybe from the learned but apparent to babes and sucklings – precisely such a one as the apostle describes in our text, upon which alone I too built my hope of salvation and willingly gave it my lowly witness (Bradley, 139).

It may be of considerable interest that Grundtvig here both expresses religious inspiration, and claims a clear line of descent, from Martin Luther. Grundtvig’s deep engagement with what he called “The Living Word” is clearly expressed in the words of this sermon. The last lines of the sermon expand on this theme:

we were thereby fitted to become servants of the new Covenant – not that of the letter which killeth, but of the Spirit which quickeneth, the living Word of God which shall last forever (Bradley, 140).

As one who has studied and written about Danish folkhighschools, I knew that Grundtvig’s insistence on “The Living Word” had taken fruit in the alternative classrooms of both the Danish folkhighschools and the free schools. What I surmised but did not understand with clarity (and what selections in this volume such as the above clearly illustrate) is that Grundtvig’s educational insights bear a close relationship to – and were most likely inspired by – integrative insights that came to him solely because of his religious faith and the way he pursued it.

I want to propose another kind of connection with the life of Martin Luther, one that focuses not so much on common understanding of religious themes as on common recourse to a similar life history strategy. That connection may be found in the particular relation between certain critical life events in the life course of the two men. Both achieved highly impressive powers of synthesis and integration, achievements which only emerged (and indeed were made possible) by a specific life history strategy that has been called “the

psycho-social moratorium.”³ It required from both men at one point a *postponing* of what would seem to be the logical next step in life. Instead of following what would seem to be the natural course of expected life history events, each made decisions whose consequences were to move them in what looks to be an odd or even *completely mistaken* direction.

Both Grundtvig and Luther made these apparently strange choices (as viewed by contemporaries). In each case these choices had the net effect of channelling their development so that it could grow inside channels to the main river, so to speak. Protected in these side channels, the development that took place allowed them to nurture the real sources of their creative power, so that when it was time for these hidden forms of personal power to emerge, their expressive potential had been fully developed. In both cases the results were an explosive outpouring that both awed their contemporaries and enabled each man to put his lasting mark upon history.

The concept of the psycho-social moratorium has been developed to deal with these issues in life history by the psychoanalyst Erik Erikson (1902-1994). A psycho-social moratorium is technically a “pause” in life, allowing an individual to postpone for a period of time either the taking on of an expected new involvement or the completion of an already existing one. Thus a young university student who chooses to drop out of school and travel around the world for two years between their third and fourth year of college may be taking such an Eriksonian psycho-social moratorium, as are most students who choose to attend a contemporary Danish folkhighschool. However, this kind of psycho-social moratorium is most likely the result of a conscious and voluntary decision. The type of psycho-social moratorium taken by Luther (as described in Erikson’s *Young Man Luther*, 1962) or (as I will suggest below) the one taken by Grundtvig was not driven by any conscious and rational decision-making process.

In his text on Luther, Erikson uses the concept of the psycho-social moratorium to throw light on momentous events and decisions in his subject’s development. Martin Luther had an ambitious, controlling, tyrannical father whose demand was that Martin should pursue the study of law. In Erikson’s words:

In February, 1505, Luther had become Magister Artium, a Master of Arts (...) he could now join the faculty, lead disputations, become the master of the burse, and eventually a dean. Most important, he was now free to embark on his father’s dream, the study of the law in the best of law schools (Erikson 1962, 90).

³ See Erikson 1962, 90-97; 1963, 262-263; Erikson 1975, 199-201.

For several months after Martin received this degree his ambitious father – who had begun to address him with the respectful *Ihr* instead of the intimate *Du* – was looking around for a suitable bride. But both before and in his first month of law school it is recorded that Martin experienced episodes of great sadness. At the end of June on the journey back to law school from home, he was surprised by a severe thunderstorm. Thrown to the ground in terror, he hears himself call out, “Help me, St. Anne...I want to become a monk.”

In mid-July, after debating the matter with friends, he knocks on the door of the Augustinian Eremites in Erfurt and asks for admission – and only when he is safely behind the walls of the monastery does he write to his father. A chain of events has been set in motion; he is able live for years as a simple monk apparently destined for the priesthood. Moving to Wittenberg his talents are recognized; he is groomed for and later holds a Chair of Moral Philosophy (1508-1509), then he is sent on an official errand to Rome before becoming a doctor of theology at Wittenberg in 1512. His psycho-social moratorium will very soon end; the future reformer’s meeting with the Pope and the centre of Latin Christendom on this official errand is “a strange interlude...as deadly as the quiet before the storm” (Erikson 1962, 169). Erikson tells us that

the conversion was necessary so that Martin could give all his power of obedience to God, and turn all his venom of defiance against the Pope. For this purpose, a moratorium was also necessary to provide time and a seemingly wrong direction, so that Martin (as Luther later put it), could really learn to know his true historical enemy, and learn to hate him effectively (Erikson 1962, 97).

Let us now re-examine the events of Grundtvig’s life between 1825 and 1832. In 1825 he is already forty-two years of age, a married man with young children and pressing family responsibilities. As discussed earlier, he deliberately sets in motion a series of events which seem to bring about the end of all his worldly prospects: no position, no income, no ability to publish freely anything he writes, and a deeply damaged reputation. Yet the choices made in 1825, far from creating the inevitable disaster which it seems must follow, will free him for another set of possibilities. They allow him to immerse himself again in the world of ancient manuscripts. They open up for him the opportunity to make the three summer voyages to England (1829-1831) that will change his life and bring everything together. Bradley reminds us that in June 1831 Grundtvig was guest of the hospitable Professor William Whewell in Trinity College in Cambridge; this experience where students take meals with their tutors will contribute significantly to his ideal of the Danish folkhighschool. It is only one of

the many contributions those voyages make to his subsequent development.

In the years after 1832, Grundtvig will passionately propose the founding of new kinds of schools based on enlightened principles of education. Beginning in 1839, he will use his pulpit in Vartov with great success to communicate distinctive theological and ecclesial ideas: through his preaching and his countless hymns (many of which are still sung today) what has been called joyous Christianity (*glad kristendom*) will be disseminated outwards from Copenhagen to the rural countryside. The optimistic views of Grundtvig the charismatic preacher and prophet – and, as he would say, the *skjald*, “people’s poet,” or “poet in the lineage of the ancient poets of the mother-tongue” (Bradley, Index, 550) – will not languish unread on bookshelves; on the contrary, these views will be wisely and prolifically planted in Danish soil.⁴ The first seeds and sprouts of his educational endeavours begin to appear on the Danish countryside in the 1840s. The first Danish folkhighschool was founded in Rødding in 1844; these schools will have a national flowering in the 1870s. From them, a series of social movements in education and other fields will arise to revitalize Danish institutions as they meet the unique challenges of Denmark’s nineteenth century, in which a land area more than five times what remains today was lost through foreign wars: Norway (1814) and Slesvig-Holsten (1864) (though Sønderjylland was recovered by plebiscite in 1920). During this century another radical change took place: the royal absolutism of nearly two hundred years duration was peacefully replaced by a constitutional monarchy, and the authoritarian and monolithic *Statskirke* (State Church) by the more liberal and diversified *Folkekirke* (National Church).

In the years after 1832, Grundtvig played an important role in facilitating these positive developments during a difficult and challenging period in Danish history. Many of these enlightened traditions have continued down to the present day. Would any of this have happened if Grundtvig had not set in motion for himself a *de facto* psycho-social moratorium by publicly taking on Professor Clausen, submitting his resignation from Vor Frelser’s Kirke, and through this stubborn act of conscience apparently giving up all of his future prospects as a churchman or a writer?

⁴ For a portrait of Grundtvig’s inner transformation to true religious prophet and visionary seen through the lens of A. F. C. Wallace’s “mazeway resynthesis,” and further exploration of his deep connection to the rich revitalization movements of nineteenth-century Denmark, see Borish 1998.

B. Grundtvig and Kierkegaard: generativity and individuation

Due to the depth of his commitment, the strength of his personality, and the power of his personal charisma, Grundtvig came to acquire many followers, especially in the post-1832 years after his return from England. The deep sense of devotion many of his contemporaries felt toward him is well expressed in the following lines written by Vilhelm Birkedal:

And if I am now asked whether I really could not then, or cannot now, see some frailty, some blemish or wrinkle in this great Chieftain of the North [*denne Nordens store Høvding*], then I would wish to reply first, that when I stand by the grave where rest the remains of my nation's and my own benefactor, blessed by God, then I have no desire to dwell upon anything but the bright and rich memories which attach themselves to this resting-place, no desire to profane the love and the gratitude by dredging up that which I cannot remember with joy. (Bradley, 269).

Not everyone who lived during Grundtvig's lifetime shared Birkedal's opinion. Among the most eloquent of Grundtvig's detractors was the author and philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. A rhetorical master of the faint praise that damns, Kierkegaard wrote the following scathing evaluation of Grundtvig:

As a thinker, Grundtvig is a genius; but so instantly a genius that the ingenious impulse or the Ingenious One's experiencing during the idea has, in respect of the mental constitution, something in common with what an apopleptic seizure is for the corporeal. An idea seizes him, he is astonished, is affected, he wants to render the whole of humanity happy with his matchless discovery [*mageløse Opdagelse*] (...) The moment he has an opinion, no matter what, it is the absolute, the matchless [*den mageløse*], the sole source of blessedness (...) whether it be his depiction of the foul ignorance of the age or his radiant prospects into a matchless future, or ingenuous wonderment over his own self, that once again he has made a matchless discovery (Bradley, 274)

Kierkegaard does not rejoice over what he calls

the Grundtvigian outcome: that one can reach the age of sixty-five and yet still remain as undialectical within one's own self, just as externally-oriented, just as clamorous as in one's youth; that is, one can be a Genius and become a geriatric without learning the least thing from life, existentially (Bradley, 275).

Grundtvig, of course, returned the favour. In one of his more restrained comments he refers to Kierkegaard as "one of those ice-cold detractors who always hang like icicles under the roof of the church" (Bradley,

Index, 473). Kierkegaard, in my judgment, missed a very important point. In all the celebrated tossings and turnings of Grundtvig's life – his voyages and transformations, his furious assaults and often bombastic claims counterbalanced by his perfect poet's choice of words for the many poems and hymns that are still sung today because they, in the words of the classic Buddhist Dzogchen text, “strike to the heart of the matter,” Grundtvig was always doing battle with what he saw as the real enemy. This was what his “matchless discoveries” were all about, the perpetual struggle with this most dangerous of all enemies. This is his true answer to Kierkegaard and to those of us who read his words today. Who is this real enemy? In Grundtvig's own words, “How vain it is to wrestle with the old troll-witch whose true name is Indifference” – he calls it “the pestilence of the age” (Bradley, 125). In the Preface to *Nyaars-Morgen* [*New Year's Morning*] (1824) he confesses that:

This was perhaps the hardest trial I have yet been through, because my reborn hope in the present generation and consequent engagement in its intellectual weal and woe *was still as a new-born babe for whom indifference can be sufficient cause of death*: but, God be praised! that danger too I have overcome – not because the world yet looks any better to my eyes but because what God wills, shall live and cannot die but is strengthened and grows with every struggle through which it passes (Bradley, 124; italics added).

Grundtvig waged a lifelong battle with this “Indifference” – the spiritual insensibility that he saw as the deepest enemy of true faith. It made him speak out when he should have held his tongue. It made him raise his voice when it would have been wiser to keep his own counsel. It made him listen to the voice of his conscience when it would have been easier to find an excuse to turn away in distraction. It made him ruthlessly judge and examine his own faith, and fall into crisis and even physical illness when he feared he was falling short of what faith and conscience required of him. He gave selflessly of himself, writing, preaching and offering counsel. In doing so, part of his life and faith came to belong (in words inspired by Carl Jung) to the collective consciousness of the Danish people.

Jung used the term “individuation” to refer to a process in an individual's life history in which all the different contents of experience are brought into consciousness and integrated at the levels of mental, emotional and spiritual development. It is described as a natural process through which a kind of deep and holistic healing can take place. It is worth remembering that the episodes in Grundtvig's life that appear to be madness, manic-depression or even possession by spirits always seem to end with Grundtvig – phoenix-like – arising

from the ashes with a renewed sense of energy and purpose. Perhaps these episodes represent in the deepest sense not the manifestation of fixed states of mental or emotional illness but rather of difficult life course movements that both accompanied and were necessary for inner crises of growth? In one of his last sermons reported by the Englishman Edward Gosse who heard it preached not long before Grundtvig's death, he warned his parishioners "to beware of false spirits and try every spirit whether it be of God" (Bradley, 331). What Kierkegaard sees as being "undialectical," "clamorous," or "externally-oriented," may be something else entirely: Grundtvig, even at the end of his life, still battling the real enemy, "*the old troll-witch whose true name is Indifference.*"

One of Erik Erikson's seminal contributions in his classic text *Childhood and Society* (1963) was a discussion of "The Eight Ages of Man." For Erikson, the alternatives for the seventh and penultimate human life cycle stage are *Generativity vs. Stagnation*. *Generativity* is, in Erikson's words (1963, 267), "primarily the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation." There is one sense in which Grundtvig clearly achieved Erikson's generativity. Grundtvig's first wife, Lise, passed away in 1851. His second wife, Marie, died in 1854 only two months after giving birth to a third son, Frederik. In 1858 Grundtvig married again; his third wife, Asta, would outlive him. He would father his last two children while in his seventies. Frederik Barfod, a contemporary who knew him well, wrote: "It has been suggested that Grundtvig said about his three marriages: the first was an idyll, the second a romance, the third a fairy-tale" (Bradley, 242).

Yet Erikson's understanding of *generativity* did not limit it to physical and emotional involvement with immediate family. It can equally well involve an effective concern for others outside the narrow realm of one's own family and community, including the next generation and future generations. It can reach into the future as well as into the past. Grundtvig's life gives a clear example of what Erikson meant by the concept of generativity. His life and work bore fruit not only for his immediate family (who of course had to bear some of his tribulations), but also for the next generations and for future generations in Denmark. Grundtvig's achievements, the legacy of his generativity, and the process that led to it have been beautifully summed up by his biographer, the church historian Hal Koch, who wrote: "It was to this wandering in the grove of humanity, with its appreciation of everything touched by life, that Grundtvig dedicated the years from 1810 to 1820, and once begun, this wandering never ceased as long as he lived. And in the process he himself was changed

from the thundering prophet of doom to life's true seer, and to the glowing lover of Denmark and all things Danish" (1943, 90).

There is a touching account of a visit made to Grundtvig two or three weeks before his death in 1872 by the distinguished early folkhighschool principal Ernst Trier (1837-93). Trier, in the process of gathering songs for the first edition of *Sange for den kristelige Folke-Skole* [Songs for the Christian Folk-school; 1874], finds Grundtvig to be an extremely attentive listener. When he reads out one of Grundtvig's songs intended for inclusion, Grundtvig tells him:

You will have to correct what appears in the second verse (...) "skin Lys *ud af* Mørke!" [shine light out of darkness] to "skin Lys *gjennem* Mørke!" [shine light *through* darkness] – for I assure you that light never comes out of darkness (Bradley, 331).

Trier then reads aloud to Grundtvig the following three stanzas from Grundtvig's own poem *Aabent Brev til mine Børn* [Open Letter to my Children; 1841], hoping they might be adapted as a new song for the collection:

A plain and cheerful, active life on earth,
as this, I'd not exchange for life of kings –
treading, illumined, one's noble fathers' track
with equal dignity in hall or hut,
with eye, as it was shaped for, fixed on heaven,
awake to all things lovely and great below
but, well familiar with those longings deep,
satisfied by eternity's light alone.

A life like this I've wished for all my kin,
and studied to achieve by diligence;
and when my soul, from brooding so, grew tired,
in praying to "Our Father" it found rest.
Then felt I the comfort of the Spirit of Truth:
that blessing hovers over this garden here,
when dust is laid in its Creator's hands,
and all is awaited in Nature's ordered round.

Only the bud, fresh, green, in early Spring,
the flowers' profusion in the warmth of Summer,
then to maturity the plant will grow
and by its fruits delight, when Autumn comes.⁵

⁵ Danish original text:

Et jævnt og muntert, virksomt Liv paa Jord
Som det, jeg vilde ej med Kongers bytte,
Opklaret Gang i ædle Fædres Spor
Med lige Værdighed i Borg og Hytte.

After hearing this, Grundtvig remarks, "If I now gave you four more lines then it would be a song with three eight-line verses." Trier writes that for a little while Grundtvig "sat and gazed through the open garden door. I shall never forget what a beautiful expression there was upon his face, and what deep emotion there was in his voice, when he said, "Write on:

Though short, though far-flung, be the course we run
it is for all men's gain, it is for growth;
as day is well begun, so well it ends,
and just as bright with life its sunset-hour (Bradley, 332).⁶

IV. Conclusion: N. F. S. Grundtvig and Walt Whitman

Writing as a citizen of the United States, I have found it useful to ask if there are any figures in the North American literary and cultural tradition with whom Grundtvig can be usefully compared. I believe that the American poet Walt Whitman is one such figure. Whitman's life and work offer fascinating counterpoint comparisons with the life and work of Grundtvig. It was Whitman (1819-1892) who wrote these lines in his "Song of Myself," found in his single published volume *Leaves of Grass* (1891-2 edition). They could well have been written for Grundtvig who, as we have seen, was often larger than life:

Med Øjet, som det skabtes, himmelvendt,
Lysvaagent for alt skjønt og stort heneden,
Men, med de dybe Længsler velbekjendt,
Kun fyldestgjort af Glans fra Evigheden.

Et saadant Liv jeg ønsked al min Æt,
Og pønsed paa med Flid at forberede.
Og naar min Sjæl blev af sin Grublen træt,
Den hviled sig ved "Fadervor" at bede.
Da følte jeg den Trøst af Sandheds Aand,
At Lykken svæver over Urtegaarden,
Naar Støvet lægges i sin Skabers Haand,
Og al Ting ventes i Naturens Orden.

Kun Spiren frisk og grøn i tidlig Vaar
Og Blomsterfloret i den varme Sommer,
Da Modenhed imøde Planten gaar
Og fryder med sin Frugt, naar Høsten kommer!

⁶ Danish original text:

Om kort, om langt blev Løbebanen spændt,
Den er til Folkegavn, den er til Grøde;
Som godt begyndt er Dagen godt fuldendt,
Og lige liflig er dens Aftenrøde.

Do I contradict myself?
 Very well then I contradict myself,
 I am large, I contain multitudes.

Like Grundtvig, Whitman had a personal sense of mission. While working on a New York newspaper he experienced a deep inner calling to become the poet of the American people, and was driven to make himself become that voice. His surviving manuscripts show clearly that shortly after expressing this inner need his written language on the page became transformed – literally from one page to the next – from the prose of journalism into lyric imagery often written with a universalistic content that would have delighted Grundtvig. I have not cited Whitman in this conclusion to engage in lengthy exegesis or comparison. I have cited him because, in the concluding lines of “Song of Myself,” he expresses through his own words and vision what I believe is an insightful way of seeing the true nature of Grundtvig’s gift of generativity to the Danish people. As the Grundtvig scholar Kaj Thaning (1972, 160) once wrote of Grundtvig, “You meet him at the border.” Or as Whitman wrote in the concluding lines from “Song of Myself” (which may be appropriate to conclude this review of a memorable and enriching text on Grundtvig’s life and work):

I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
 I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.
 I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
 If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.
 You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
 But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
 And filter and fiber your blood.
 Failing to fetch me at first, keep encouraged,
 Missing me one place search another,
 I stop somewhere waiting for you

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