Two New Translations of Grundtvig

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The School for Life: N.F.S. Grundtvig on Education for the People. Translated and edited by Edward Broadbridge, coedited by Uffe Jonas, Ove Korsgaard and Clay Warren, Aarhus, University Press, Aarhus 2011, Hardback, 440 pp., with CD, 399 kr. And: *Living Wellsprings: The Hymns, Songs, and Poems of N.F.S. Grundtvig.* Translated and edited by Edward Broadbridge, coedited by Uffe Jonas, Aarhus University Press, Aarhus 2015, Hardback, 420 pp. 399 kr.

As early as 1950, American scholars were asking the Grundtvig Society to render selections of N.F.S. Grundtvig's writings into English and, in the intervening sixty-odd years, a number of translations appeared, but none of them sufficiently sampled Grundtvig's voluminous output, a corpus that has been figured at 1,475 known texts, totaling some 35,000 pages. The very idea of this overwhelming bulk of this body of work may well have served to stymy any sustained effort at translating it. Then, in 2008, appeared S. A. J. Bradley's masterful *N. F. S. Grundtvig: A Life Recalled*, a work that "made available to readers the most extensive collection of Grundtvig's writings yet to appear in English".[1] And now the newly reformed Grundtvig Study Centre at the University of Aarhus is making significant progress in its effort to produce a series of five major English translations of Grundtvig's work. Recently, the Centre has published two invaluable scholarly resources that are the focus of this review, *The School*

[1] Bradley, S. A.J., trans. *N. F. S. Grundtvig: A Life Recalled. An Anthology of Biographical Source-texts Translated from the Danish,* Aarhus Universitets-forlag, Aarhus 2008. For the review, see Steven Borish, *Grundtvig-Studier 2010*, pp. 154-76.

for Life: N. F. S. Grundtvig on the Education of the People (2011) and *Living Wellsprings: the Hymns, Songs, and Poems of N. F. S. Grundtvig* (2015).

Both of these handsome volumes, artfully translated and edited by Edward Broadbridge, with scholarly assistance from scholars like Clay Warren, Uffe Jonas, and Ove Korsgaard and with linguistic consultation by John Nicholson, represent significant progress in the long effort to make Grundtvig's writings available in English to the international scholarly community. I should emphasize the descriptor "scholarly" here. The exemplary translations and expert academic explanations each selection receives are indeed of a high quality, but because the two books offer clear and thorough accounts of the materials they include, I also believe that these texts will be of interest to a broad readership. Thorough introductions launch translated selections, which are rendered clearly while maintaining a sense of Grundtvig's often complicated allusive style. Accompanying scholarly apparatuses clarify complications arising from Grundtvig's writing style and arcane references by offering historical contexts and guidance to readers about the ideological or philosophical issues underlying the texts. Both books include a variety of illustrations, chosen to provide glimpses into Grundtvig's life and the history and culture of nineteenth-century Denmark. An attractive dimension of these texts comes in the form of audio files that were made for every translation (on an accompanying compact disk for *School for Life* and online in digital audio files for *Living Wellsprings* at www.unipress.dk). Inclusion of these recordings indicates to this reader that the translator and editors were, in their work, admirably sensitive to Grundtvig's attitudes towards the power of the spoken word.

The School for Life is a team effort, with Edward Broadbridge as the lead translator and editor. Ove Korsgaard provides an overview of Grundtvig's philosophy of education, Uffe Jonas introduces each individual text, and Clay Warren concludes the volume with a discussion of the international reception of Grundtvig's educational ideas. Korsgaard's overview places Grundtvig the educator in the company of Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel and explains his adjustment of the trichotomy of modern educational philosophy. We learn that his philosophy that grew out of his life experiences with English liberalism during his four trips to England (1829, 30, 31, and 43) and his sensitivity to impulses coming from the continent, such as the July Revolution in Paris in 1830 and the wave of revolutions sweeping

Europe in 1848. Even his personal encounters, such as his exposure as a young man to writings of German Idealism, figure into his development as an educational thinker. But Korsgaard digs deeper still into key ideas of Grundtvig's educational philosophy to explain points that are required for understanding a number of the selections included, but his introduction wisely does not exhaust these points and therefore does not compromise the individual reader's experience of encountering each individual selection on its own terms. For each individual selection, Uffe Jonas writes specific introductions that bridge the gap between the sentiments in Korsgaard's general introduction and their expression in each translated selection. Concise explanations are given for the historical situation in which Grundtvig is writing, as well as how the piece fits within the larger structures of Grundtvig's thinking.

The sixteen selections are organized chronologically, spanning the period from 1827 to 1854, when Grundtvig was most active in educational reform. They were chosen from *Grundtvig's Skoleverden* (*Grundtvig's School-World*, 1968), edited by K.E. Bugge. Broadbridge states that his intention was "not to replicate the difficulty of the(se) original texts but to render them into modern British English for both the scholar and the interested reader" (9). The range of texts – from poems and songs to scholarly articles and books to letters, both private and openly – give a rich variety of perspectives and a number of opportunities for fresh encounters with Grundtvig's work, even for scholars with a solid base knowledge of Grundtvig's world-view. One issue that American readers will no doubt discover with interest is, for example, Grundtvig's progressive idea about the role of religion in public education, a recurring point of debate in American education since the early twentieth century. In "Education for the State" (1834), he writes that it is a bad idea to "painfully thrust Christianity into children as a *lesson*" and two years later in "Is Faith Truly a School Matter," he imagines that "the parents of *no* faith must find it just as intolerable to send their children to Religious Instruction under an 'orthodox' schoolmaster as we do to send ours to one of the *opposite* kind" (124). His point is not about individual freedom as much as it is about how people should come to faith in God. Even in this subtle distinction, these lines seem prescient, anticipating the many debates about the place of religion in twentieth century American public education.

Opportunities for discovery like this one are clearly a result of Broadbridge's efforts to avoid reproducing unnecessary complexity and straighten out Grundtvig's many circumlocutions, ones that might otherwise cause misunderstanding. Grundtvig regularly claimed, for example, that real education can only come through the mother tongue, and he asserted that educators and education must meet the needs of the people. Similar claims appear throughout his educational writings and, without a clear, direct, and complete rendering, might be misunderstood as hyper-nationalistic and therefore taken as dangerously single-minded, but in "The School for Life and the Academy at Sorø" (1838), for example, Grundtvig explains that language is the singular tool for living interaction (202) and that popular education must be rooted in the people and their language (203); his version of proposed language legislation differs radically from the "English-only" proposals that occasionally arise in staunchly conservative circles in America. From the variety of the selections, readers come to see that Grundtvig regards language as the primary catalyst for a living, inclusive interaction that will foster real learning. As for its opposite, irrelevant and mind-numbing rote learning, Grundtvig asks in 1827, "Who can fail to recognizes here the true basic law for all academic establishments which is: unless they make themselves indispensable they are a burden as absurd as they are oppressive" (40). Again, a surprising prescience might be noted, as institutions of higher learning today find themselves increasingly called to prove their usefulness in society. The subtlety of Grundtvig's point is clear: he is talking about how they must be indispensable to the *people*, in their desire to thrive in their respective societies, not the other way around.

The chosen selections also capably display Grundtvig's changing attitudes about best practices in education. The passages reveal him thinking about his own thought processes, in a seemingly post-modern self-questioning way. Aware of his own inconsistencies, he admits, for example, in *Nordic Mythology* (1832, 57) and in "To the Norwegians Concerning a Norwegian High School" (1837, 179) that he is conscious of the paradox of his call for the living word through writing. Such self-reflection seems to be fully in keeping with his idea of "dia-logos" or what we might call an ongoing effort to get at the truth. But it also might be a reason that Grundtvig's writings are difficult to reduce to a clear set of straightforward ideas.

In a concluding essay about the international reception of those constantly developing ideas, Clay Warren investigates a variety of writings and institutions that have directly or indirectly followed Grundtvig's educational thought. Two problems are encountered here. First, the very nature and style of Grundtvig's work, which was organic and never laid out in one final form and most of which was not disseminated in a way that would allow for international reception, has created problems for its international reception. Warren acknowledges that his "idiosyncratic old-style Danish and interminable paragraphs" are hardly understandable to the contemporary reading public (369). Warren is able to work through this problem by discussing how the idea of the folk high school found its most vibrant expression through the creation of similar institutions all over he world and how over the past four decades there has been an increase in books about Grundtvig. These explanations lead to a second problem: many of Grundtvig's writings have not been read outside of Denmark because few influential scholars were able to read Danish, much less Grundtvig's Danish. Warren himself acknowledges this point, too (353), and he turns instead to comparisons between the assumptions generally held by American adult educators and those held by Grundtvig, and he provides instead a very useful survey of articles and books coming from around the globe about Grundtvig. From this, it is clear that Grundtvig has gained an international reputation, but, in the light of general ignorance until the late twentieth century of Grundtvig's actual writings, it is difficult to discover an overarching acceptance or conscious employment of his educational ideas. I believe that Warren is right to conclude that *School for Life* will go a long way to remedying the disconnect between international interest in Grundtvig's writings on education and available translations of them.

Living Wellsprings: The Hymns, Songs, and Poems of N. F. S. Grundtvig, also translated and edited by Edward Broadbridge, is also a handsome book, containing 16 color illustrations chosen and annotated by Michael Schelde. Along with concise, information-packed notes, there is a useful bibliography (I) and a handy set of indices, including a reference for the Biblical references (II), side-by-side listings of English and Danish titles for hymns and songs (III-III), a listing of tunes and composers for the hymns and songs (IV), and side-by-side listings of English and Danish titles for the poems (V-VI). With this thorough scholarly apparatus in

place, the translations offers a variety of discoveries for readers of English of Grundtvig as philosopher and theologian and as a feeling human being dealing with life's challenges.

This volume features what are likely Grundtvig's best known and loved works, ones many Danes know by heart. Grundtvig wrote some 1,500 hymns and songs —253 of them make up the 791 in the *Danish Hymnbook* (2002) and 86 of them make up the 572 in the *People's High School Songbook* (2006)—and over 1,000 poems. An astonishing poetic oeuvre! The decision was therefore made to form a committee to choose which texts to include. For the hymns, priority was given to the works best known and most regularly sung; 76 of them were chosen. Twenty-eight songs were chosen according to similar criteria, and 58 poems were selected according to themes about Denmark, the men and women who inspired the poet, and his wives and children. In his preface Broadbridge explains the rationale behind these choices, as well as his method of translation, which is to "produce precise, poetical translations that reflect Grundtvig's intentions with the original Danish" (25). He offers commentary on "Grundtvig, England, and the English Language" and "Grundtvig and Music." These remarks are, in my opinion, of crucial importance to a scholarly appreciation of Grundtvig as a poet and as a man, and they are highly appropriate for a volume that seeks to render Grundtvig's deepest feelings out of his beloved mother tongue and into the English language. They include snippets of his own writing in English and some other brief passages that reveal, surprisingly, that the great hymn- and song-writer was not musical.

The introduction by Uffe Jonas that follows is of a similar high quality to Korsgaard's introduction to *School of Life*. It avoids redundancy; in fact, the information complements the earlier volume nicely and is entirely pertinent to Grundtvig's poetry. Jonas builds upon an opening summary of Grundtvig's life, particularly the key moments of his "mythological awakening" and his Christian breakthrough, to give a scholarly account of Grundtvig's philosophy of poetry, which structured his views of history and nationhood. I suspect that many readers new to and familiar with Grundtvig's work will find that the section about "Grundtvig and the Feminine" relates an unsuspected perspective of the great thinker. Jonas writes, "Grundtvig held a thoroughly positive view of women, whom he regarded and idealized not only as mothers and bearers of *eros,* but as prac-

tical wisdom-sources, almost like an actual angelic presence in this world" (61). These insights become more nuanced by the claim that "his images of manliness are permeated by feminine ideas such as dialogue, wisdom, poetry, compassion, tenderness, and human equality" (63-4). Points such as this lend heightened complexity and an unexpected modern flavor to the reading experience.

I highly recommend reading the hymns and songs, in the first two sections, while listening to the digital recordings available online or, for those who can read music, with the musical scores of the hymns at hand.[2] First verses of all of them have been performed by a choir accompanied by organ, a practice that, I think, nicely preserves their nature as participatory events meant to unfold in the flow of time. But each hymn and song can also be enjoyed as poetry. Take the example of the hymn from which the book is named, "All my living wellsprings in you shall begin" (no. 57). As a carefully crafted poem, it brings content and form together. The opening verse of each stanza proclaims what each stanza does, that is, each simultaneously announces the singers' gratitude and creative power of God's words, his "voice," "tidings," and "promise." The result is a satisfying unified message that is validated through its performance.

The songs, of course, range further afield taking in secular themes as well as religious ones. They, too, can be enjoyed as poetry. Some of the songs, like "See the sunrise" (no. 97), direct singers to action—to "see," "waken," and "rise"—so that the traditional heroic call to action is brought to life in the moment, as singers become simultaneously narrators and performers and themselves characters in the narrative. Like Grundtvig's hymns, the songs are meant to be active, physical and joyful experiences, not just passive academic ones. The translations relate this intention quite well. One overarching characteristic of the translations becomes very clear after a reading of all of the poems and reflecting on their collective effect: Broadbridge has produced translations that recapture Grundtvig's wonder at God's creation and man's place in it. Broadbridge's achievement is that his work bears the mark of Grundtvig's call for "a plain and cheerful, active life on earth."

In closing, I would point readers to an entertaining short video on the publisher's website (www.unipress.dk), where Broadbridge reads aloud (or

[2] Scores are published by Krogh Publishers, Copenhagen 2003.

rather performs), first in the original Danish and then in English, a famous passage from the long introduction to *Nordic Mythology* (1832). He is reading only one complete sentence, but it takes him one minute and fifteen seconds and afterwards, he explains that the passage is difficult to translate into English because it has "195 words, 27 commas, two parentheses, one semicolon, and one full stop." Clearly, the translation was no easy task, but the end result for English readers is a joy to encounter. Scholars and general readers alike will find these two translations to be not only invaluable sources for the study of the work of an influential modern genius, but also a very pleasurable reading experience, one that is inspiring and full of surprising insights.