'With Lute, Cloak and a broad-brimmed Hat' - Stray Notes on two Drachmann Songs

rom the beginning of his career, the work of the Danish poet and writer Holger Drachmann (1846-1908) was associated with notions such as rhythm, tonality and melody, in short, with musicality. Many of his poems use poetic imagery and stylisations that tend to be described in musical terms and metaphors. These poems are often incorporated in larger texts and contexts, for example novels or plays. Furthermore, a vast number of Drachmann's lyrical texts were subsequently set to music by contemporary musicians and composers, among them world-famous composers such as P.E. Lange-Müller (1850-1926), P.A. Heise (1830-1879), Edvard Grieg (1843-1907), Frederick Delius (1862-1934) and Carl Nielsen (1865-1931). Although most of Drachmann's literary work has fallen prey to the ravages of time, his songs have remained remarkably popular. One might even claim that the only texts that really have survived for contemporary

See Jørgen Fafner, Det metriske særprag i Drachmanns verskunst, 1953.

Ove Bjørnum's *Sangindeks*, 1981, registers 68 different songs with Drachmann texts that appeared in the years between 1860 and 1960, the period the index covers. Approximately half of them can be found on the internet, see http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/d/drachmann/ [accessed on 04.09.2006].

See Henk van der Liet, 'French Fungi', 1999, pp. 201-202.

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Danes are some of Drachmann's songs, the rest of his huge oeuvre has, by and large, been consigned to oblivion.

The most famous of these songs are undoubtedly 'De sønderjyske Piger' [The girls from Northern Schleswig] and, one of the real golden oldies in Danish singing culture, the so-called Midsummer Eve Song 'Vi elsker vort Land' [Our Country we love]. Interestingly, the only text by Drachmann that made it to the very heart of Danish national cultural heritage – the so-called "Kulturkanon", presented in 2006 – is precisely the song 'Vi elsker vort land'.⁴

It is often maintained that these songs' continuous popularity is not actually due to Drachmann's skills as a songwriter but rather to the composers who wrote immortal music for them: for 'De sønderjyske Piger', Henrik Hennings (1848-1923), and for the Midsummer Eve Song, P.E. Lange-Müller. In this short essay I would like to take a look at both these songs, in order to see how much truth there is in the assertion that it is mainly because of the music that Drachmann's songs have survived.

Guardian angels

Let us begin with the poem/song, 'De sønderjyske Piger', written in 1877. In the spring of that year, Holger Drachmann took a journey to the Danish-German border, to the area around the city of Flensburg. In those days this territory was ideologically speaking a quasi no-man's land for the Danish political elite. It is an area filled with human and historical drama: it was here that the Danish army was defeated by the Prussians in the war of 1864. Thus, the area around Flensburg had become an awkward mixture of enemy territory and homeland. Many years later, after the First World War, it was decided in the Treaty of Versailles to solve the Danish-German border dispute by means of a plebiscite, which was held in 1920. Large parts of the area, south of the line Haderslev-Ribe and

⁴ See *Kulturkanon*, 2006, or www.kulturkanon.kum.dk.

north of the line Flensburg-Tønder, became part of the kingdom of Denmark again, while other parts, with a majority of Germanspeaking inhabitants, were integrated with Germany.

The battlefields at Dybbøl, near Flensburg, where the Danish army lost its most crucial battle to the Prussians, have become a spot where Danes celebrate their national and historical self-image by sharing a number of collective icons, such as the Dybbøl windmill, and sing patriotic songs and hymns. At this historic site, with its distinctive windmill on Dybbøl Hill, visitors find a museum and the battlefield itself, with trenches and fortifications that have been unearthed or reconstructed over the years. It is important to remember that Dybbøl is not only a real geographical area, but also a mental construction, i.e. a place of national interest where historical collective values are manifested and kept alive. In this context, Drachmann's text and the music of the song 'De sønderjyske Piger' are instruments that have helped to create what 'Dybbøl' stands for, and have been instrumental in supplying the place with ideological content and context.⁵

Memorising the past implies making narrative and other constructions of the past and tying them to *loci memoriae*. In the case of Dybbøl, a battlefield and a mill have become locations that help us to understand the past by putting it in a collective ideological framework, thereby producing identity and a sense of continuity. Part of the ideological machinery that sustains it, however, is the ensemble of the music and text of 'De sønderjyske Piger', written by Drachmann in 1877.

This text is an embedded poem. It was published as a part of the essayistic travelogue *Derovre fra Grænsen* [From Across the Border]. This work became Drachmann's most successful book ever, it

Inge Adriansen, *Nationale symboler*, vol. II, 2003, p. 258.

Etienne François & Hagen Schulze (eds.), Deutsche Erinnerungsorte, vol. I, 2001, p. 14.

was published in at least half a dozen editions during the author's lifetime. One of the reasons for the text's huge success may well have been the immense popularity of one single poem embedded in the last chapter. This poem is often referred to as 'De sønderjyske Piger', or by it's opening line: 'De vog dem, vi grov dem' [They slew them, we buried them].

The text sings the praises of the northern Schleswig women and girls who showed their patriotic disposition by taking care of the graves of fallen Danish soldiers. The impact of this attitude is the more significant because many of these graves were located in private gardens. These young women personify 'pure' patriotism and historical continuity, and because they take care of the dead in their own gardens, they are continuously confronted with the past, which also makes them even more determined not to fraternise with Germans. Thus the women, and especially the girls, living in the 'occupied' Danish territories in Northern Schleswig are depicted by Drachmann as guardian angels or Walkyries, i.e. tenacious custodians of history and Danish values.

Soon after the publication of *Derovre fra Grænsen*, the poem 'De sønderjyske Piger' was set to music by the composer Henrik Hennings. Hennings was not the only composer who wrote music for Drachmann's text, Frederik Rung (1854-1914) also wrote music for the song, but his composition did not become as well known as that by Hennings.⁸ The score and the text were published in the widely read journal *Ude og Hjemme* on 14 April 1878 (reproduced on

Derovre fra Grænsen, 1878, pp. 129-130

Later, Frederik Rung was really successful with some other compositions written for or in co-operation with Drachmann, among them Festspil i Anledning af Stavnsbaandets Lasning [Festival play on the occasion of the abolition of adscription], which had it's premiere on 21 June 1888 at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, and Tusind og én Nat [The Arabian Nights], which was first played on 10 January 1892 at the Dagmar Theatre, likewise in Copenhagen.

pages 144 and 145), and shortly after the song was republished by the music publisher Oscar Risom in Copenhagen and the song became highly popular in its own right.⁹

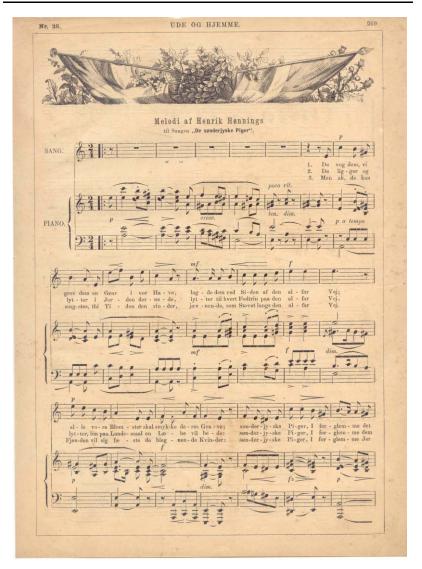
The social historian Inge Adriansen asserts in her monumental two-volume work on Danish national symbols that Drachmann's literary image of Dybbøl helped to establish the 'myth' of Dybbøl as the Danish pendant of the heroic battle at Thermopylae in ancient times, when the Spartans were outnumbered. Notwithstanding their actual loss in battle, they became the moral victors because they resisted a militarily superior enemy.¹⁰

The effectiveness of the Dybbøl imagery can only be fully understood as the result of the synergy of a number of different media, which results in a joint ideological effort. Part of this has been – and still is today – the annual door-to-door collecting of money by schoolchildren. The benefits of this campaign, which has taken place since 1920, go to the Danish (linguistic) minority living in Germany. Furthermore, huge numbers of picture postcards of the windmill at Dybbøl, and 'the girls from Northern Schleswig', some with and some without poems inserted in the composition, were produced and found their way into innumerable Danish homes, especially in the years before the 1920 plebiscite. Drachmann was one of the most productive suppliers of these texts.

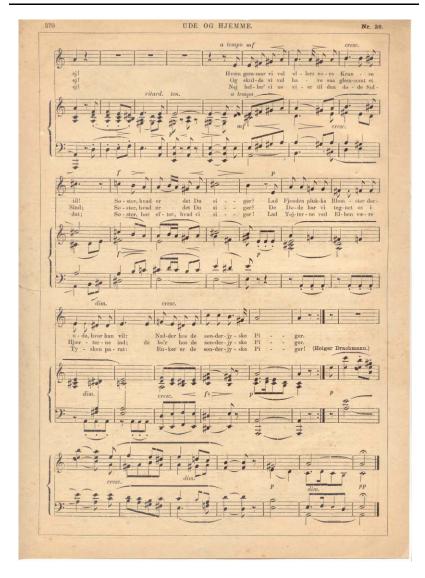
Seven years later, in 1885, Drachmann even tried to 'capitalise' on the enormous success of *Derovre fra Grænsen* and the popularity of the embedded song 'De sønderjyske Piger' by writing a sequel.

Melodi af Henrik Hennings til Sangen 'De sønderjyske Piger", in Ude og Hjemme, no. 28, 14 April 1878, pp. 297-270. The second edition, as a book, was 'De sønderjyske Piger' Vexelsang af Holger Drachmann's Derovre fra Grænsen sat i musik af Henrik Hennings, 1878.

¹⁰ Inge Adriansen, *Nationale symboler*, vol. II, 2003, pp. 251-260.



Henrik Hennings (1848-1923) music for Drachmann's 'De sønderjyske Piger', published in *Ude og Hjemme*, nr. 28, April 14, 1878.



Again it was an essayistic travel book, quite similar to *Derovre fra Grænsen*, about the then still unresolved border issue in southern Jutland, entitled *Danmark leve! Blade fra en Rejse paa begge Sider af Grænsen* [Long live Denmark! Pages from a Journey on both Sides of the Border]. Clearly Drachmann's aim was to rekindle the patriotic mood of 'De sønderjyske Piger', 11 but at the same time he utilised a confessional tone, which seemed to want to take the sting out of any criticism of this obviously cheap way of gaining success, which was only to be expected. But the trick did not work and *Danmark leve!* was not a success at all, probably because of the book's limited literary qualities, its propagandist discourse and its overtly demagogic patriotism.

The book's lack of success must have been a painful experience for Drachmann. He witnessed how other authors jumped on the bandwagon, and that a rapidly growing number of literary books about the 1864 war and its aftermath were appearing in the 1880s and early 1890s. Among them were *Hinsides Grænsen* [The other Side of the Border] (1887/1888), written by his friend Erik Skram (1847-1923), and work by one-theme-authors like P.F. Rist (1844-

See Holger Drachmann, *Danmark level*, 1885, p. 145. It is worth noting that portraits of local girls and women in southern Jutland dominate the last part of the book, just as in *Derovre fra Grænsen*, where 'De sønderjyske Piger' is also situated in the final section of the text. To give an impression of the way Drachmann tried to tie this new book to his earlier bestseller: the narrator in *Danmark level* visits a local graveyard in the company of the two young daughters of his host, a Danish farmer and patriot, living under Prussian rule. While they stroll around, one of the girls suddenly points far away in the distance, in the direction of Denmark, where she has spotted an object, which turns out to be a windmill(!). Thus, Drachmann links the two books together by recycling the border theme, the gender issue, and the ultimate symbol of patriotism for his readership, the Dybbøl windmill. Although the girl only sees an ordinary mill, she dramatically exclaims: "En Mølle . . . Danmark!" [A mill . . . Denmark!], *Danmark level* pp. 160-161.

1926). 12 This thematic interest in a dramatically lost war was probably also caused by the fact that the literary - and artistic - domain suffered less from censorship than the political arena.



Late 19th Century photograph of "De sønderjyske Piger".

Works by P.F. Rist include, for example, the anonymously published En Rekrut fra fire og treds (1889), Soldater (1890) and Efter Dybbøl (1892).

Nevertheless, 'De sonderjyske Piger' is still sung and popular in Denmark. And with respect to the main question of this essay, the amount of truth in the assertion that it is mainly because of the music that Drachmann's song has survived, no real evidence thereof has been found. Hennings' music is still frequently used, as is the text.

From Lange-Müller to Shu-bi-dua

Let us now turn to the second song under scrutiny here, the Midsummer Eve Song. This song can be found in numerous collections, but it was first published in 1885 in Holger Drachmann's collection of poetic texts *Fjæld-Sange og Æventyr* [Mountain Songs and Fairytales]. It is one of the songs embedded in the romantic fantasy play *Der var Engang* [Once Upon A Time]. Soon after publication in this mishmash collection, the play was printed separately in a volume of its own as well. Two years later the music, written by Peter Erasmus Lange-Müller, was published, and the first performance took place at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen on 23 January 1887.

Lange-Müller wrote the music for a number of operas and theatrical compositions, of which *Der var Engang* was his first and also his greatest success. With approximately 450 performances at the Royal Theatre, and some 1500 other stagings, its frequency is only surpassed by the romantic opera *Elverhøi* [Elves' Mound, 1828]. The text of this play was written by Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791-1860) and the music was composed by Friedrich Kuhlau (1786-1832).

Der var Engang, including 'Vi elsker vort Land', became instantly popular. In its first season on stage it was performed 35 times, which also meant that Drachmann made a fortune from box-office

Holger Drachmann, Fjæld-Sange og Æventyr, 1885, p. 195.

takings.¹⁴ Later, in the period between 1922 and 1949, it became a highly appreciated play for outdoor performances during the summer too, and this 'tradition' was revived in 1998, on the occasion of the Royal Theatre's 250th anniversary. Furthermore, *Der var Engang* has twice been adapted for the screen, the first time in 1922 – by Carl Th. Dreyer, as a silent movie – and the second time in 1966 by John Price.

Der var Engang is a romantic fantasy play which, in the first printing in Fjald-Sange og Æventyr, had seven acts, or 'billeder' [scenes], but later the text was thoroughly edited and reorganised by Drachmann himself so that it finally came to consist of five acts and a prelude. It is this later version that tends to be staged and is found in numerous editions, and it is this version, too, that is dealt with here.

What is really under scrutiny here, though, is the song embedded in this play, 'Vi elsker vort Land'. The first time it was printed, in Fjald-Sange og Æventyr, the song was part of Der var Engang's seventh and last act, and it comprised three verses. Most people who today sing the song in a private setting will only sing these original three verses, although in a number of printed and performed versions of the song, a fourth verse has been added. This fourth verse is often the grand finale of the play, immediately before the curtain drops. The additional fourth verse was first performed in the course of the first season, a few months after the premier, on 17 September 1887. That evening the Danish royal family, who had also been at the premier, again attended the performance, and this time the company was composed of the 'entire' royal family: the King and Queen of Denmark of course, but also the Tsar and Tsarina of Russia, the King and Queen of Greece, and the Prince and Princess of Wales. All these royal heads of state were related to each other, and not surprisingly, the extra verse also makes allu-

¹⁴ See Johannes Ursin, *Holger Drachmann*, Vol I, 1953, pp. 42-43.

sions to the marriage of the founders of this dynasty, King Christian IX and his wife Queen Louise.

The song 'Vi elsker vort Land' is sung by a soloist, a huntsman, and a choir. The theme, of course, is linked to Midsummer, the solstice, but the first verse starts at Christmas. It then sings the praises of spring, and finally focuses on the climax of the summer: the longest day of the year, named after Saint Hans. The second verse expands on the image of summertime, the lust for life and the riches of nature that bloom and bear fruit. Every verse begins with the same phrase, i.e. 'Vi elsker vort Land', and in the first two verses the second line in both cases refers to a season – first Christmas, and in the second verse Midsummer. In the third and final verse, though, the seasonal motive is absent right from the beginning. In the third verse, the tone changes remarkably, from a sweet and innocent seasonal theme to a militant, maybe even martial and violently patriotic one. The first half of this final verse goes as follows:

Vi elsker vort Land, og med Sværdet i Haand skal hver udenvælts Fjende beredte os kende. men mod Ufredens Aand over Mark, under Strand, vil vi Baalet paa Fædrenes Gravhøje tænde: [etc]

[Our country we love, and with sword in hand we stand ready to face any foreign foe that gathers but 'gainst spirit of strife upon field, upon strand, we'll light fires on the burial mounds of our fathers.]¹⁵

¹⁵ An English – as well as a German – translation of *Der var Engang* can be

With the literary theme of Midsummer's Eve, the solstice and the collective festive atmosphere surrounded by all the classical elements – between land and sea, in the open air and with bonfires lit – this song appeals to very strong sentiments. Thus Drachmann's Midsummer Eve song has become intensely charged with collective memory, and in my opinion this justifies labelling this songs, in Pierre Nora's terminology, as a *lieu de mémoire* or *Erinnerungsort*. This phenomenon has been most accurately defined in a German version of Nora's concept, *Erinnerungsorte* are:

Generationen überdauernde Kristallisationspunkte kollektiver Erinnerung und Identität, die in gesellschaftliche, kulturelle und politische Üblichkeiten eingebunden sind und die sich in dem Maße veränderen, in dem sich die Weise ihrer Wahrnehmung, Aneignung, Anwendung und Übertragung verändert.¹⁷

This hypothesis is thrown into relief by the famous painting by P.S. Krøyer, *Sankt Hansbål på Skagen Strand* (1906), where Drachmann and his wife are actually represented standing close to the bonfire, left of the centre of the picture. Not only does the image show an archetypical social situation for all Danes, it also – notwithstanding the limitations of a painting – refers to other non-visual experiences, i.e.: the community singing, the sound of the sea and the bonfire, the heat of the fire, the romantic atmosphere, etc.

found in the CD booklet of the recording of Lange-Müller's music by the Danish National Radio Symphony Orchestra and Choir, directed by Michael Schønwandt, published in 1997. The record was issued by the record company Dacapo, Copenhagen [no. 8.224084]. The translation into English of Drachmann's text in the booklet is by James Manley. The translations in this essay have been slightly altered by the author, HvdL.

In my forthcoming essay, 'The discovery of a memorable place - Holger Drachmann as Travel-Writer', in Marie Wells (ed.), *Scandinavian travel writers*, I will elaborate this hypothesis in more detail, HvdL.

Etienne François and Hagen Schulze (eds.): Deutsche Erinnerungsorte. Vol. I, 2001, p. 18.



P.S. Krøyer (1851-1909): St Hans bonfire on Skagen Beach (1906). Oil on canvas, 149.5 x 257 cm. [Skagens Museum]

A 'new' classic?

It is often maintained that, ideologically speaking, Holger Drachmann was an unreliable twister and a turncoat, who changed attitudes and opinions all the time. ¹⁸ But in a number of ways he may also be seen as a modern cultural explorer, who was constantly on the move, looking for mental and symbolic borders, probing them, permeating them, breaking them down and redefining them.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Drachmann still inspires contemporary authors who write about national, political or ideological issues, such as the playwright Sten Kaalø (1945-). In the 1980s, Kaalø used Drachmann's travel book *Derovre fra Grænsen* – including the text of 'De sønderjyske Piger' – when he wrote a love comedy entitled *Komedie i grænselandet* [Comedy in the Borderland],

See for example Ulrich Horst Petersen, 'Holger Drachmanns provisorier', in his own Mens jeg husker det. Essays 2001-2005, 2005, p. 118ff.

which is situated in the Danish-German borderland in the year 1906. In this play Drachmann's text is extensively cited, paraphrased and maybe even plagiarised by Kaalø. ¹⁹ This, nevertheless, is a sign of the unremitting appeal to writers and artists of Drachmann's work, long after his own lifetime.

Another example of how Drachmann's work has inspired others also comes from the 1980s. In 1980 the successful Danish pop group Shu-bi-dua took Drachmann's text of the Midsummer Eve song and turned into a pop song, basically leaving Drachmann's words untouched but with radically different instrumentation and music to Lange-Müller's. The idea for this quite remarkable musical adaptation and rearrangement came from the journalist and TV personality Kirsten Jacobsen. Furthermore, the massive success of this modern version of the Midsummer Eve Song was certainly brought about by the fact that it became easier to sing for multiple voices, i.e. for community singing, which is particularly convenient because it is most frequently sung during festive gatherings on Midsummer's Eve. Shu-bi-dua's melody is much easier to sing, especially when there is no accompaniment, than Lange-Müller's rather solemn and less 'rhythmic' music.

In a recent thesis, the musicologist Henrik Marstal mentions another possible reason for the enormous success of the pop version by Shu-bi-dua. He proposes the idea that the song by Shu-bi-dua had such a huge impact because it was not only launched on national television, but was also part of the soundtrack of a movie,

In act 1 scene 5 of *Komedie i grænselandet* (1981) large sections are simply copied from *Derovre fra Grænsen*, without any reference to Drachmann's text whatsoever. Compare Kaalø pp. 40-41 and 80-81, with *Derovre fra Grænsen* pp. 93, 99 and 129-130. Drachmann's chimneysweep, though, has changed profession in Kaalø's text, becoming a coachman.

The record is called *Shu-bi-dua 7*, and was launched in 1980, the CD version was released in 1990. See www.shubidua.dk [accessed on 04.09.2006].

Henrik Marstal, Sange fra glemmebogen, 2005, p. 34.

a so-called *folkekomedie*, which was a hit in 1981, the popular comedy *Olsen-Bandens flugt over plankeværket* [The Olsen Gang's escape over the Fence]. ²² Drachmann's continued success is thus perhaps not primarily caused by his text, but because a new pop version was launched on national television, and as part of the soundtrack of an enormously popular comedy. ²³

The answer to the question of whether it is mainly because of the music that Drachmann's songs have survived can tentatively be answered in the affirmative, at least for the Midsummer Eve Song. But it is not the appeal of Lange-Müller's romantic orchestration that caused it. On the contrary, it is more likely that it was the straightforward aesthetics of modern pop music, and its proliferation through mass media, that secured Drachmann's fame as a songwriter – for at least another generation.

The motion picture was directed by Erik Balling and released by Nordisk Film A/S, on 16 October 1981.

²³ Henrik Marstal, Sange fra glemmebogen, 2005, p. 121, note 10.

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