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GEORG BRANDES AND THE MODERN PROJECT

Georg Brandes' lecture series on *The Main Tendencies in 19th Century Literature* was initiated in 1871 and consists of a number of innovative interpretations of European literature. Brandes' interpretations exemplify his interest in the ideals of the Enlightenment: knowledge, liberation, progress and free thought. The lecture series traces a dialectical movement in European literature, described by Brandes as a dialectics between revolution and liberalism on one hand and conservatism and reactionary tendencies on the other. Brandes includes a dialectics between home, i.e. Danishness, and the 'foreign'; he opens up a dialogue between nationalism and internationalism with the intention of almost literally placing Europe in Denmark and vice versa. The future was going to be realized in the present. Georg Brandes tried to persuade the young writers of Scandinavia to adopt liberalism and naturalism in their novels and dramas, which some of them proceeded to do, convinced as they were that Brandes' ideas regarding a new 'debate', moral and political, in literature, were right. However, they failed to implement these ideas as we can see by a reading of, for example, Jens Peter Jacobsen's *Niels Lyhne* (1880); Henrik Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* (1886) and Henrik Pontoppidan's *Lykke-Per* (1898–1904). Emancipating the mind and liberating oneself from the reactionary forces of society turned out to be too difficult for the women and men of what Brandes himself referred to as The Modern Breakthrough. Looking at Brandes today we may conclude that he was ahead of his own time as well as ahead of ours. His ideas regarding a new internationalism and liberalism are far from being realized.

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The life and work of Georg Brandes (1842–1927) represent an extension of the Enlightenment. Brandes inaugurated what he called “the Modern Breakthrough” when he started a lecture series on *Main Tendencies in 19th Century Literature (Hovedstrømninger i det 19de Aarhundredes Litteratur)* on November 3rd 1871. In his opening lecture Brandes emphasized that he was an enthusiastic advocate of academic freedom and that he believed in the victory of free thought. Implicit in this belief in free thought we may find all the enlightenment ideals: knowledge, liberation and progress, conceived and realized as a faith in knowledge itself as the primary prerequisite in the European quest for sociopolitical liberation and for scientific and humanistic progress. This quest was to start as a ‘modern breakthrough’, or a breakthrough of the ‘modern’ in Scandinavian culture and literature; we may subsume the Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough under the – still on-going – Modern Project in European thought and politics whose concrete goals are equality, civil rights and minority rights, the continued emancipation of women, the distribution of wealth, and

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equality. In his lecture series Brandes presented a historical survey and an in-depth interpretation of the period 1789 to 1848, starting with a presentation of the socioeconomic, political and cultural movements leading to the French Revolution in 1789. Brandes' intention was to integrate politics, culture and literature in his presentation, while indicating the ubiquitous presence of 'free thought' in all areas of life. Brandes' 'free thought' is, of course, traceable to the philosophy of Descartes and to the Cartesian subject, which I would characterize as a subject or self unified by thought, or rather, a human subject in whom thought and existence are integrated. Contrary to the host of 20th and 21st century intellectuals hostile to the very notion of a Cartesian subject, among them deconstructionists and Habermasians, I am convinced that there is a subversive dimension of the Cartesian subject to be discovered or disclosed; for the Cartesian subject does not represent a neutral and passive Universal. On the contrary, it represents a dynamic, individualized concretization of the Universal that I detect precisely in the life and work of Brandes. His life and work represent an individualized, dynamic scientific and humanistic theory and practice which combines intellect and sensuousness. Brandes' sensuousness is expressed in comments and letters on Italian women dating from his travels in Italy in 1871. The critic notes how Italian women appear free of the constraints and are sensually liberated from the repressiveness of Nordic society, and Brandes' own sensual nature prompts him to react critically towards the Lutheran church and Christianity in general as he advocates personal sexual and intellectual emancipation as a major precondition for societal and cultural progress. Brandes' thought exemplifies, on the whole, a dialectical pattern of action and reaction, or thesis and anti-thesis. The books published on the basis of the several-year long lecture series manifest this pattern. *Emigrant Literature (Emigrantlitteraturen)*, 1872, blends revolutionary and reactionary, conservative features in French emigrants from 1789. Reactionary conservatism is described in the works *The Romantic School in Germany (Den Romantiske Skole i Tydskland)*, 1873, and *Reactionen i Frankrig (The Reactionaries in France)*, 1874. The book *Naturalism in England (Naturalismen i England)*, 1875, presents Byron and his revolutionary ideas and poetry, and in *The Romantic School in France (Den Romantiske Skole i Frankrig)*, 1882, the new liberal movement of 1830 finally has its breakthrough. In the work *The Young Germany (Det Unge Tydskland)*, 1890, Brandes jumps from France to Germany where he concentrates on poets like Heinrich Heine who were inspired by the July Revolution. In the opening lecture Brandes describes his method as comparative: The comparative approach to literature will bring the foreign text closer to us so that we may absorb it; and it will remove our own literature and culture from us so that we may gain an objective perspective on them. The method is referred to as a dialectical technique of contrasting, or as a dual perspective of comparison. By engaging in this dual perspective Brandes achieves three major objectives in the works published between the years 1872 to 1890. Firstly, the works apply a certain 'camouflage technique', as the Brandes scholar Hans Hertel calls it (Hertel 2004: 63). Brandes camouflages his work as literary criticism, but underneath the surface we detect social critique. Secondly, Brandes blends literary criticism, cultural history and critique, and the history of ideas and mentality; at the same time Brandes develops an interest in the creative mind behind the literary work and starts focusing on author biography. Thirdly, all of the works implement the comparative method

described above. In connection with this final point I see Brandes emerging as a cosmopolitan idealist, and a radical one at that; for his deeper intent is to transform Danish and Scandinavian culture by 'bringing it closer' to the foreign dimension to be found in European – British, French, German, Italian, Polish, Russian – literature and in the revolutionary and liberal movements in contemporary European politics. Needless to say, Brandes mastered the English, French, German and Italian languages and was able to lecture in Russian, so he definitely practiced what he preached! Further, the new or 'foreign' dimension he found in European literature and which he wanted to introduce at home was naturalism, and he tried to persuade major Nordic writers to adopt the form and style of naturalistic literature as well as the motifs; societal problems such as the emancipation of women and liberation from oppressive social and religious forces were to be subjected to debate. This became a key word for major authors like Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Jens Peter Jacobsen, Henrik Pontoppidan and others.

1. THE DIALECTICS OF BRANDES

I will now comment in more detail on the specific kind of dialectical movement characteristic of Brandes' life and work as I see it. First of all, what I am tempted to call 'Brandesian dialectics' include the historical dialectics that surfaces in the works listed above; it is a dialectics between revolution in thought and practice and reactionary tendencies following the revolution, or revolutions; secondly, it is a dialectic that includes foreignness and exile, in Brandes' case an actively sought and self-imposed exile consisting of extensive travel in a large number of European countries, including Germany, France, Italy as well as Poland and Russia (1886), and America. By traveling abroad and searching for impulses in foreign cultures Brandes sought to distance himself from his small provincial home, Denmark, but it was also his intention to bring new impulses with him home and to try to propagate these impulses through his intellectual activities at the University of Copenhagen and through his massive publications, which eventually came to include a book on Søren Kierkegaard, a biography of William Shakespeare in three volumes, and biographies of Julius Caesar and Michelangelo. He also introduced Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy in Denmark. His endeavor to spread innovative impulses at home did not meet with success, however. He was the object of public criticism and attacks for several years. The professorship in aesthetics which had become vacant by Carsten Hauch's death in 1872 was not awarded to Georg Brandes. He had to go to Berlin and establish himself as a critic there and did not get a professor's chair at the University of Copenhagen till 1902. The obvious reason for this exclusion of Brandes the scholar was his radical liberalism and his advocacy of individualism which alienated him from the national liberals in Denmark and from the growing socialist movement and parties there as well. Brandes was not in favor of systems, political or intellectual, and he objected to the societal and religious tendency to repress human passions and to subject the individual to a specific social order. Brandes' liberalism was so radical that it approximated anarchism, and he introduced the ideas of Piotr Kropotkin in Denmark. In the years

1888–1889 he also introduced the naturalists Gustave Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant, Émile Zola and Leo Tolstoy, and he gave lectures on Friedrich Nietzsche, publishing the work *Aristocratic Radicalism* (*Aristokratisk Radikalisme*) on Nietzsche in 1889. The portrait of Nietzsche painted in this work fits Brandes himself to perfection: He describes the philosopher as a fearless immoralist and an independent spirit relentlessly criticizing mediocrity and the moral double standard of Christianity.

The specific Brandesian dialectics outlined above is unique; yet it may be said to exemplify an implicit Hegelian model. Hegel's notion of individualization is particularly modern, for he speaks of individualization through secondary identification. This means, simply put, that the individual tears himself away from his primordial organic unity, home, family, country, and immerses himself in a new environment, a secondary community which is *universal* and where he may identify with a larger group of, for example, professionals and intellectuals. Such a move constitutes Brandes' particular cosmopolitanism. From a Hegelian perspective what happens is this: the secondary identification is an abstract universal inasmuch as it is opposed to primary, concrete identifications with home, family etc.; however, as Slavoj Žižek notes, the "shift from primary to secondary identification does not involve a direct loss of primary identifications: what happens is that primary identifications undergo a kind of transubstantiation" and through this transubstantiation the formerly abstract secondary identification becomes *concrete* when it "reintegrates primary identifications, transforming them into the modes of appearance of the secondary identification" (Žižek 1999: 90). Brandes' cosmopolitan ideals were concretized in his work as a critic, and one of the objectives of this work was precisely to transform the narrow provincial community of Denmark into a cosmopolitan society. Brandes' special route to cosmopolitanism is doubly interesting from a Hegelian point of view; 'home' for him was a Jewish home, Danish to be sure, but not Christian, so he was already at one remove from Danish provincialism through his background. Moreover, Brandes did not identify with his own Jewish background and increasingly distanced himself from it so that he ended up being what Jean-Paul Sartre was to call 'an inauthentic Jew', as Hans Hertel notes (Hertel 2004: 56). His doubly marginal background placed him at a peripheral location from where the move abroad was not far. At home he was still referred to as a 'Jewish radical' and became an object of exclusion, discrimination and moral indignation. The collective Danish projection of Brandes as a 'radical' and as 'Jewish' divided the country into two camps, one in favor of Brandes and one distinctly anti-Brandesian. During lectures held by a number of professors at the University of Copenhagen in 1912 a virtual civil war broke out between those for and those against Brandes' radical liberalism. Hertel notes how one anti-Semitic Jewish professor, Konrad Simonsen, attacked Brandes, calling him an 'untalented plagiarizer' (Hertel 2004: 56). The division was not only academic but spread far into Danish politics, left and right. What is interesting about the incident at the university and the concurrent divisions and discussions in the political parties is, of course, that no one really understood Brandes; everyone tended to look at him from the narrow Danish perspective, whether they were for him or against him. His radical liberalism and cosmopolitanism formed a unique transformation of the primary identification through the secondary identification, as I have pointed out; from a contemporary point of view Brandes is an example of an independent,

public intellectual who is active outside academia. Hertel notes that the Palestinian-born scholar Edward Said is the best contemporary example of an academic whose work transcends the narrow confines of academia and who has the courage to participate in active social criticism (Hertel 2004: 52). Edward Said has commented that the greatest danger in today's academia, and indeed, today's society in general, is specialization. I believe he is right. Pseudo-objective standards are imposed upon today's scholars, and upon this background Brandes' personality and work may serve as a potent antidote because of his *personal and subjective* approach to literature, culture and society. Brandes' special blend of liberalism and cosmopolitanism raises his subjectivity to a higher level, the level of the transpersonal, paradoxically.

Briefly put, Brandes' ultimate goal was to locate Europe in Denmark, almost literally. The special combination of marginality and universalism, individualism and cosmopolitanism, served as the catalyst for the intellectual activities that were to bring about the fulfillment of this objective. His scientific theory was based on the new French and English positivism: empirical observation and objective analysis of cause and effect. His scientific ideals were the positivistic sociologist Auguste Comte, the empiricism of John Stuart Mills and Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. He found the critique of religion he needed in the Germans Ludwig Feuerbach and Leo Strauss. Everything led to secularization and relativizing of so-called eternal absolutes. Human desire and passion was, as I have pointed out above, in the foreground in Brandes' cultural critique, which included attacks on the provincial and idyllic and on typical Danish 'coziness' (*hygge*). The lack of awareness and consciousness and the tendency to be dreamy and passive was epitomized in the sculptures of Thorvaldsen, according to Brandes. Opposed to this Danish inertia Brandes poses the vigilance and insight of the emigrant, e.g. Madame de Staël who had become a fugitive from Napoleon's dictatorship; she was both inside and outside, emancipated as well as in possession of erotic energy and a high degree of self-awareness, self-reflection. In his work *Emigrant Literature* Brandes cites Madame de Staël as stating that the foreign, or foreigners, people in exile like herself, constitute "la postérité contemporaine"; in other words: the future in the present. Brandes' presentation of Madame de Staël no doubt contributed to his popularity among women in Denmark.

The collapse of the Paris Commune in 1871 following violent events stirred anti-French sentiment in Denmark. The collapse had profound effects on Danish politics as the electorate moved to the right. Nationalism and conservatism were in the forefront and Brandes took a public stand against the nationalist liberals and the new Conservative Party (*Højre*). However, from the mid-1870's a new liberalism was born in Denmark and a new Liberal Party (*Venstre*) was formed that was opposed to the old liberals. A lot of this is undoubtedly to be seen as a result of Brandes' own work: his tireless effort to introduce new impulses into Danish culture and politics. The Liberal Party included a radical wing consisting of people that thought like Brandes; they were in favor of free thinking and free trade like him, although they might not embrace his ideas on the secular society.

The ultimate test of Brandes' ideas was to come in the literature written by the so-called 'men of the Modern Breakthrough'. Was the goal of liberation and emancipation to be fulfilled or were there too many internal and external obstacles to be overcome?

2. THE MODERN BREAKDOWN

Yet another dimension of what I have called the 'Brandesian dialectic' needs to be explored and commented on briefly at this point. Brandes' own entry into 'the Modern' was internal as well as external; as critic and as private individual he fulfilled a dual revolution: a revolution within, i.e. a liberation of the mind, intellectually and sensually, and a revolution without, i.e. active involvement in contemporary social, political and cultural matters. His involvement led to profound changes that were beginning to spread throughout society, in part through the political actions of the new Liberal Party in the last three decades of the 19th century, especially the radical wing of that party. Concurrent with this overall tendency to liberalization in society emerges a powerful socialist front in Danish and Scandinavian politics in general, itself embracing and disseminating an ideology of internationalization and worker emancipation. Brandes did not become a socialist or a social democrat, though; he maintained his focus on the *individual* as the sole genuine vehicle of the transformation from within and from without he wished to bring about in literature and society. The reason for his rejection of socialist ideals was his suspicion that conformity and majority rule were to follow a socialist breakthrough in Danish politics.

The reasons for his skepticism are more complex than that, though. Brandes returned from Berlin in 1883 and that same year he published the work *The Men of the Modern Breakthrough* (*Det Moderne Gjennembruds Mænd*). These were the leading men in Scandinavian letters that were to propagate the liberation from within and from without proposed by Brandes in other works. A direct link was to be established between literature and society through a dynamic manifestation in literature of the forces and ideas of liberalism and revolution (in a non-Marxist sense of that word). The forces of liberalism were to be expressed in and by major characters in the novel, in drama and in poetry, as well as the visual arts. The road to liberation, mental and political, was to be paved by characters – men and women in literary texts – who understood how to transform and sublimate the negative impacts of heredity and environment, thus creating the 'future in the present' that Brandes had referred to in his work on Madame de Staël; this future in the present was nothing less than a new individual free of inhibitions, emotionally and intellectually, and a society envisioned as a truly Modern Project: a society characterized by openness, tolerance, equality, freedom and democracy.

The new literature was to be a naturalist and realist literature. Naturalism's preoccupation with heredity and environment did not disturb Brandes. On the contrary, he applied a naturalistic philosophy systematically in his own works. An interesting contradiction emerges here as regards his own dialectics, as they appear in his life and work. The naturalistic focus on heredity and environment would seem to be a kind of determinism designed to prevent emancipation and liberation, in the mind and in society. It is indeed a curious contradiction, a paradox even, that Brandes was able to liberate himself from his own background, distancing himself from it to the point of ignoring it altogether. How could that be? The answer is that Brandes in his own person and in his own work embodied a liberation, *instinctual as well as conscious*, from that very heredity and environment and other repressive factors which so many of his contemporaries were limited by. Further, Brandes

emerges as an epitome of the Modern and the Modern Project, an individual already living in the future and trying to communicate that future to his contemporaries, men of the present and, in most cases, men of the past. Brandes is the modern cosmopolitan, a rare specimen indeed, both in his own time and in ours.

The ability to transcend repressive mechanisms, mental and social, was envisioned by Brandes as the avenue to freedom and openness, then, and he challenged the men of the Modern Breakthrough to find the right scientific, psychological and literary methods to discover, express and enhance that ability. He was disappointed. The literature created by these 'modern men' turned liberation into a problematical and complex affair. The texts that I want to discuss in what follows show sexual inhibition in male and female characters, and political conservatism which exerts control and generates repression, thus eventually preventing the freeing of the human subject from occurring at all. I have selected J. P. Jacobsen's novel *Niels Lyhne* (1880), Henrik Ibsen's play *Rosmersholm* (1886) and Henrik Pontoppidan's novel *Lykke-Per* (1898–1904), where Brandes appears as a character (fictionalized and under a different name but easily recognizable), as examples of literary texts that illustrate the virtually insurmountable gap between the ideal of freedom, emotional, moral and political, and the repressive realities of a predominantly conservative Scandinavian community.

Jacobsen's *Niels Lyhne* had been awaited by Brandes for quite some time. He was not enthusiastic when it was published in 1880. Through correspondence with Georg Brandes' brother, the newspaper editor Edvard Brandes, Jacobsen had basically promised that he would follow the Brandesian program in writing a historical and realistic work of fiction. As it turned out, Jacobsen was unable to do that because he saw things differently and was aware of how difficult the emancipatory act really was; he did not make the protagonist Niels into a convincing atheist embracing the new ideal of liberalism. Moreover, the women characters in the novel are somewhat less emancipated than was the French author Madame de Staël. One of them, Mrs. Boye, marries an older man for security despite her professed preference for independence and despite the fact that she is an accomplished intellectual with artistic gifts. Niels' relationship with the young woman Fennimore exhibits the core of the problem: Niels' frequently proclaimed atheism and liberalism, his enthusiasm for 'the new', has assumed the guise of a dream, a hollow ideal that Fennimore calls 'poetry'. Niels' 'poetry' and idealistic visions, which he imposes on the young woman, act like a prohibition against desire; paradoxically, the prohibition against desire *creates* desire, thus thwarting Fennimore's character and turning her into a slave of sexual passion. Her former integrated self is divided and her intellectual pursuits and interests are pushed into the background. We are confronted with a dialectical problematic immanent in the relationship between the two characters. Niels' past, especially his parents, enter the picture here, for Niels is said by the narrator to have 'inherited' two major features from his parents: a realistic attitude from his practical father and an idealistic, dreamy attitude from his mother. His liberalism and atheism become infected with the dreamy aspect of his nature and are turned into an almost religious idealism or puritanism. His idealism, or 'poetry' as Fennimore calls it, has an adverse effect on the woman's mind and produces the split I have described. Eroticism is relegated to a 'lower' moral level owing to the pressure

of Niels' 'poetic', near-Christian idealism that acts like a puritanical discipline. Thus Jacobsen's naturalism, in a way, becomes a true naturalism: determinism. His method opens up the erotic only to destroy it so that his text ends up showing the repressive 'demonized' dimension of sexuality instead of its liberating potential. The male-female relationship in the novel illustrates Michel Foucault's theory that power and desire generate one another. As Foucault puts it: "The soul is the effect and instrument of a political autonomy; the soul is the prison of the body." (Foucault 1979: 30). It is no wonder that Brandes was not happy when the book was published. Jacobsen's text transformed emancipation into repression and showed the prevailing forces of society, Christianity and political conservatism, to be intact. The ultimate purpose of the political and religious power in society is to preserve the 'system' by preventing the development of individualized ethics: ethics as an 'aristocratic radicalism', as Brandes (and Nietzsche) saw it.

Brandes must have felt increasingly alone as this scenario was unfolding in contemporary literature. The 'breakthrough of the modern' turns into a modern breakdown in the literature published during the last three decades of the 19th century. The male and female characters of this literature cannot handle moral and political freedom; the collapse of a system based on absolute truths and values, imposed from the outside, is counteracted by a tendency towards individualization, to be sure. But individualization assumes an extreme, almost desperate form as it becomes absolutist in itself. Jacobsen's novel is superbly ironic in this respect, and the same is true of Henrik Ibsen's drama *Rosmersholm*. The irony is a double irony in the case of Ibsen's drama; for it is also a self-irony. Ibsen had embraced Brandes' program for the novel, the theater and the arts enthusiastically. However, in the play I am commenting on here – as well as in Ibsen's drama on the whole, from *A Doll's House* (1879) to *When We Dead Awaken* (1899) – individualization and liberation, potentially present in the characters Rebekka and Rosmer as desire and joy, are repressed by overwhelming feelings of guilt. Rather than transmitting the future into the present, the play demonstrates a singular, Freudian 'compulsion to repeat', despite the fact that the leading male character, Rosmer, has renounced his affiliation with the Christian church and announced his intention to become a vanguard of the new liberalism sweeping Norway. He wants to work for the cause in his own way, by trying to turn people into happy, *noble* people. The word 'noble' is a hidden allusion to Brandes' 'aristocratic' attitude, aristocracy being an aristocracy of the mind, i.e. the liberated, fulfilled, integrated mind. A politically powerful, conservative figure in the community where the estate Rosmersholm is located, manages to make Rosmer feel guilty about the death of his wife who committed suicide by jumping into the river. In the opinion of this conservative neighbor, too much liberation, politically and sexually, will destroy the social order. The 29 year old woman Rebekka has been living with Rosmer at the estate for a number of years, and conservatives in the community – a smaller town in southern Norway – object to the relationship, failing to accept the notion of an intellectual friendship between a man and a woman.

Rebekka has a problem with sexuality almost identical to that of Fennimore in *Niels Lyhne*. She confides, or *confesses* to her friend Rosmer that in the beginning of their relationship she was possessed by a wild, uncontrollable desire for him; she states that this

desire threatened to distort her will and her mind and that she, subsequently, had to renounce it and sublimate it, or channelize it into intellectual endeavors. Rosmer's ideas about the free, happy, noble mind come from her. Transforming the conservative, Christian community into a society of morally and intellectually noble people is to be their common project. A project straight out of Brandes' head, I would say. The project fails because Rosmer proposes marriage and Rebekka refuses. She refuses because she is afraid of the re-emergence of sexual desire in her mind; she needs to preserve her independence by being an intellectual, and apparently this is impossible for her if an erotic relationship were to be initiated between them. The project also fails because of Rosmer's increasing guilt regarding the death of his wife; he ends up resigning himself from the whole project. The project now becomes individualized, ironically, for he changes, or rather preserves his ideal by internalizing it: the freedom and nobility that he failed to bring about in the community at large is to be achieved in the personal relationship between himself and Rebekka where it is to manifest itself as a deep spiritual love. Rebekka feels that the only way she can provide proof of such a love is by committing suicide. At the end of the play the two characters die together by jumping into the river. Rebekka had come to Rosmersholm, Rosmer's family estate, with a strong will to act and a superior intellect. Her will is broken because of the repressive presence of the past in the community. For both of them the quest for freedom becomes absolute to the point of being absolutist, that is, the quest changes freedom into a form of dominance. Ibsen manages to explore the paradox of freedom; as I note in my book on Ibsen, Brecht and Beckett, freedom is "an abyss that would *swallow* the subject, making it absolutely and *infinitely* free" (Veisland 2009: 102). The price of absolute freedom of self is, in a sense, self-annihilation.

The protagonist of Henrik Pontoppidan's novel *Lykke-Per* is a young aspiring engineer from a devoutly, almost pietistic Christian background. Like Niels Lyhne he renounces Christianity at an early age; and like Niels he re-adopts it at the end of his life so that the novel assumes a circular, repetitive structure that reflects the conservative, repetitive social order the author sets out to analyze and criticize. As a young engineering student in Copenhagen Per is attracted to two potentially revolutionary milieus: the new science and technology coming from abroad, mostly Germany and the United States; and the wealthy Jewish milieu in Copenhagen where he is received frequently as a guest in the home of the influential financier Philip Salomon with whose daughter Jakobe he has a fairly short-lived love relationship.

The new science inspires Per to conceive and plan an ambitious engineering project involving the construction of canals across the peninsula Jutland (*Jylland*) as well as new extensive harbor facilities close to his native home. His concept and the sketches he presents to influential professors at the university meet with skepticism and are judged to be too bold and unrealistic from an engineering perspective. He does not give up, and friends persuade him to seek support for the project, scientific as well as financial, from people more ready to embrace new liberal ideas in economics and the sciences. He is introduced to the financier Salomon and other powerful, progressive members of the Jewish community in Copenhagen which the novel provides a detailed portrait of. He gets the support he needs eventually; however, an odd opposition develops to his engineering project in the

Danish media where Per's canal and harbor project becomes misrepresented for political reasons. He has enemies deep within conservative circles and starts losing his 'luck' (the name *Lykke-Per* means 'Lucky Per'). At the same time a friendship grows between him and Jakobe, a young intellectual woman with a sensual, passionate nature not inhibited by a sense of guilt; guilt in connection with sexuality seems to be non-existent in the Jewish people Per encounters. The whole environment is open, sensuous, relaxed and progressive, which is a new experience for Per. Unfortunately, his engineering project turns into an obsession and he is unable to respond to Jakobe's open, passionate nature. Inhibitions from his childhood prevent him from marrying her, and he starts entertaining plans for extensive travel in Germany and, eventually, America. He travels throughout Germany but never gets to the United States.

As a scientist Per has become fairly intimately acquainted with the radical ideas of Dr. Nathan who frequents the Salomon home. Dr. Nathan, nicknamed 'Dr. Satan' in the novel, is Brandes appearing as a fictional character but painted realistically, although Pontoppidan's description of him tends slightly and subtly in the direction of caricature. The caricature manifests itself in the narrative voice as a reflection of the common, popular misconception of Brandes/Nathan as an overly sensual aesthete. Dr. Nathan appears at a party in the Salomon home where he is surrounded by admiring young women. Dr. Nathan is also described as a scholar and critic possessing an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and a profound desire to bring the 'future' to Denmark. Dr. Nathan's intellectualism does not inhibit his spontaneous nature and overall sociable character. The narrator notes how this precise spontaneity and vivaciousness cause a lot of hostility in the provincial and predominantly Christian city of Copenhagen, but at the Salomons Nathan is quite at home. His vivacity has also created the prejudice that he is not really a 'genius', at least not compared with the Danish Christian philosophers and theologians Grundtvig and Kierkegaard. The narrator's assessment of Brandes'/Nathan's intellectual gifts reflects the common prejudice and turns the portrait in the direction of caricature, as I have noted. The positive aspect of the narrator's assessment of Dr. Nathan is the accurate description of his rhetorical gifts and his enormous influence on not only young students at the university but also on the general public. It is precisely these rhetorical powers in Dr. Nathan's personality that inspire opposition and a new even more reactionary Christianity.

Although Per does not suffer from or share the common prejudice against Dr. Nathan, he fails to understand the deeper significance of radical liberalism. He reads Dr. Nathan's books but concludes that his writings are those of an aesthete concerned with the arts and the humanities, not the natural sciences and certainly not engineering. Per's rejection of Dr. Nathan's work is symptomatic of a dissociation between the sciences and the humanities that Brandes himself certainly tried to overcome. The division between science, literature and politics manifests itself in Pontoppidan's text as the inevitable outcome of the power structure of society. Political power is maintained and executed by dividing the mind and dividing knowledge itself into compartments that may be controlled. The reason Per does not meet with approval regarding his engineering project is quite simply this: Society is not ready for it since it has failed to integrate the *future*, which includes the unity of knowledge and cooperation between academic disciplines.

3. THE MODERN PROJECT AND BRANDES TODAY

From Brandes' point of view the future is now. The relevant question to ask, then, is this: Are *we* in the future, or, in other words, have we accomplished the modern project that the men of the Modern Breakthrough could not accomplish?

Certainly not. The future is still ahead of us, not as an unattainable Utopia but as a society that may be created by applying Reason and by extending and supplementing Universal Right. The Modern Project is 'modern' exactly because it includes Right in a continuous dialectical motion between an abstract Universal Right and a concrete subjective or individualized Right. Each new addition of formerly excluded individuals or groups to the Universal will change the Universal so that we cannot conceive of it as a stable Whole. Nevertheless, it is a Whole but one that is infinitely open to differentiation, supplementation and individualization. Brandes was so much ahead of his time – and so much ahead of ours! – that he understood the dynamic dialectic between the internationalism and the nationalism and was able to apply his insight to his research and teaching on literature, culture and social science. It was in his 'nature', if we may call it that, to be attracted to French culture in particular; but this attraction is also symptomatic of a more general or universal need for revolution in the sense of continuous subversion of petrified social and cultural organisms. The subversive core of the Cartesian subject emerges in Brandes' person as a dynamic interplay between his overt sensuality and penetrating intellect. The open, forwardly propelled dynamic of this interplay was conditioned by a singular lack of inhibition. I have commented that this lack of inhibition was, unfortunately, not present in the male and female characters of the literature belonging to the Modern Breakthrough, i.e. the last three decades of the 19th century. Rebellion against authority in both male and female characters tended to take extreme forms so that it ended up polarizing 'us' and 'them'; those included in the Right, i.e. the conservatives, Ibsen's 'pillars of society', and those excluded from the Right, artists and intellectuals and, in particular, women, working for the new liberal conception of knowledge and freedom, i.e. a new Cartesian paradigm. The two camps became locked in their positions.

Brandes was not locked in any position. Although his ideas often tended beyond radical liberalism and came close to anarchism, he avoided the extreme forms of individualism that was to manifest itself in the fascism of the 1920's and 1930's. The final 'modern' breakdown is individualism turned on its head: the individual as a figure of totalitarian authority. Such individuals are present with us today in growing numbers. They are the terrorists that become terrorists because they refuse to be included in any universal Right, preferring to remain excluded from it and perpetuating a vicious circle of irrational hatred and vengeance. Hans Magnus Enzensberger calls these individuals 'radical losers' (Enzensberger 2006: 12).

Brandes commented regularly and extensively on events surrounding the outbreak and course of World War I in Scandinavian newspapers. His critical attacks on the war focused on economics and had a distinctly anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist ring to them. He had a sound knowledge of economics and politics, but he probably could not have anticipated the outbreak and spreading of terrorism today. The antidote to the extreme forms of radicalism we are witnessing now is a re-evaluation and re-activation of the Cartesian paradigm.

Brandes' particular practice of that paradigm is testimony to his special genius. His genius consisted in a mind in balance yet in perpetual, dynamic motion and engaged in 'subversive' activities. He may, rightfully or wrongfully, be criticized for not including women writers in his book on the Modern Breakthrough. However, he included a good portion of the feminine in himself. The wholeness, the unity of the mind and the world makes up the paradigm of knowledge and liberation that he left us and that we are still working with.

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GEORG BRANDES I PROJEKT NOWOCZESNOŚCI

Zapoczątkowany w 1871 roku cykl wykładów Georga Brandesa pt. *Główne prądy literackie XIX wieku* składał się z wielu innowacyjnych i odkrywczych interpretacji literatury europejskiej. Interpretacje te dowodzą zainteresowania Brandesa ideałami oświecenia: potęgą rozumu, wiedzą, emancypacją, postępem, swobodą myślenia. Owa seria wykładów opisuje pewną tendencję w literaturze europejskiej, scharakteryzowaną przez G. Brandesa jako dialektyczny rozdzwitek pomiędzy rewolucją i liberalizmem z jednej strony, a konserwatyzmem i reakcyjnymi zapędami z drugiej. Brandes mówi też o dialektyce „swojskości” (w tym przypadku duńskości) i „obcości”. Zapoczątkowuje dialog między nacjonalizmem a internacjonalizmem, z intencją niemal dosłownego wprowadzenia Europy do Danii i odwrotnie. Według Brandesa przyszłość powinna być realizowana już w teraźniejszości. Brandes próbował przekonać młodych literatów w Skandynawii, by w swych powieściach i dramatach stosowali konwencję liberalizmu i naturalizmu. Niektórzy z nich tak czynili, przekonani, że idee Brandesa postulujące nową „debatę” etyczną i polityczną w literaturze zasługują na uwagę i wartę są wcielenia w życie. Jednak trudno stwierdzić, że im się to całkowicie udało. Możemy się o tym przekonać czytając np. powieść *Niels Lyhne* Jensa Petera Jacobsena (1880), dramat Henrika Ibsena *Rosmersholm* (1886) i powieść Henrika Pontoppidana *Lykke-Per* (1898–1904). Wyzwolenie umysłu i uwolnienie się od reakcyjnych sił kontrolujących społeczeństwo okazywało się często zbyt trudne dla kobiet i mężczyzn przełomu nowoczesności (Brandes jest twórcą tego terminu). Przeglądając się dzisiaj twórczości Brandesa, możemy pokusić się o stwierdzenie, że wyprzedzał on zarówno swoje własne, jak i nasze czasy. Jego idee dotyczące nowego internacjonalizmu i liberalizmu nie doczekały się jeszcze pełnej realizacji.

Słowa kluczowe: projekt nowoczesny; wolność i emancypacja, naturalizm, literatura jak krytyka społeczna, Europa w Danii