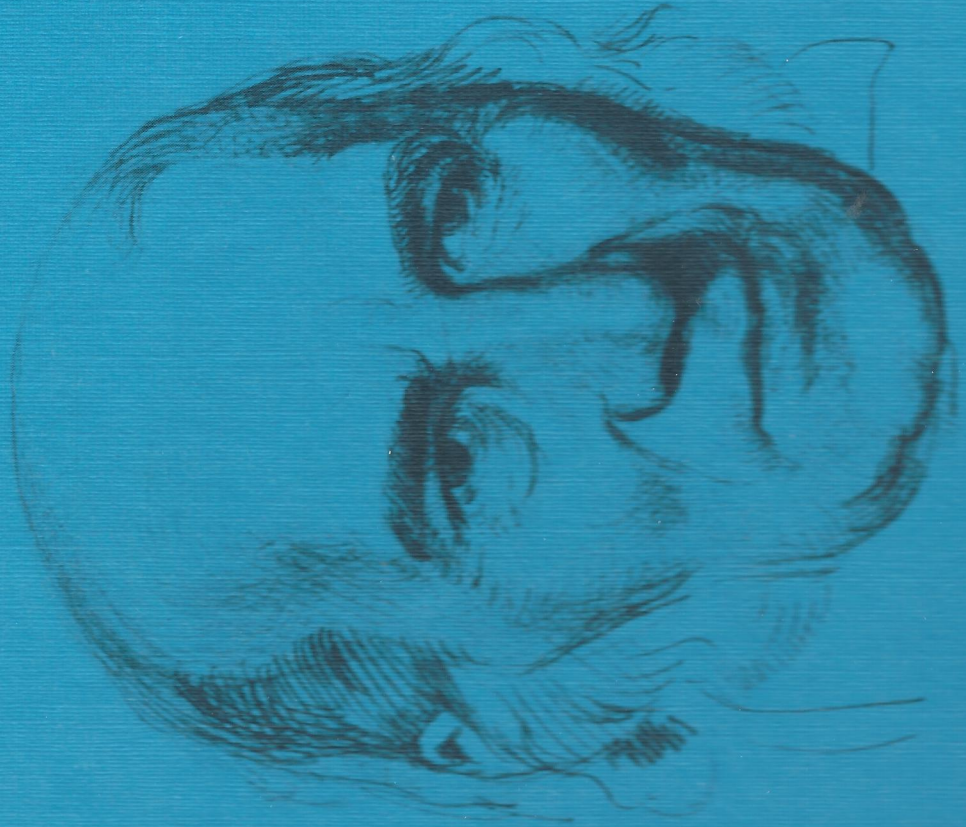


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# GRUNDTVIG'S

Ideas in North America



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*Influences and Parallels*

Grundtvig's Ideas in North America



1983

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Cover: N.F.S. Grundtvig in 1847 (contemporary drawing by P.C. Skovgaard).  
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# Grundtvig and Mythology

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This subject is, I believe, not very prominent in recent Grundtvig scholarship. Nor is it conspicuous in the lecture programmes for the seminars devoted to Grundtvig's ideas in the bicentenary of his birth. Yet, myth and mythology take up an essential position in his life's work. It was as a mythologist he first distinguished himself in the world of learning. Myths are important sources of inspiration for his poetry, and he wanted the telling of myths and interpretation of them through the medium of the living word to be an important element in the curriculum of the school for life he wanted to set up for the people as an alternative to the deadening classical learning of the traditional grammar school. Grundtvig is also in a sense a myth-maker himself, as for instance in his paraphrase of the Anglo-Saxon poem about Christ's descent into Hell (ascribed to Caedmon) and in the two seminal poems from 1824, "New Year's Morning" and "The Land of the Living". Grundtvig's poetry functions like that of William Blake and William Butler Yeats by reference to a fabric of mythical elements with their special meaning, which the poet has forged for himself. To explain this in Grundtvig's case would even with reference to the Danish originals be a formidable task, in English simply an impossibility.

What I propose to do is to give an impression of Grundtvig's works on mythology and the way he intended myth to enter into the teaching of the folk high schools. Also I shall say a little about the way this was put into practice in the schools during the first decennia they were active. I shall discuss the reaction against mythology that set in from the 1880s, and give an impression of the way pupils responded to mythology as far as it can be known. Finally, I shall say something about the attempts in more recent times of reviving the narration and interpretation of myth as part of the folk high school curriculum.

The interest in mythology, particularly Norse mythology, is a prominent feature of the age of preromanticism and romanticism, and that

Grundtvig should dabble in it as a young student is not surprising. He did, however, prepare himself for going deeper into the subject when, under the guidance of a friend, P. N. Skovgaard, he studied Old Norse. It was not, however, his early antiquarian interest in Norse mythology that made it so important for his poetry and ideas about education; it was the romantic break-through, triggered by his passionate love for Constance de Steensen-Leth in Langeland, which lent an existential significance to his engagement in the myths of the North.

In his diary from Langeland he writes on 30th December 1806:

"Now I came to this place where my eyes were opened to the sanctuaries of love, where it was sharpened to contemplate the wonders of poetry and of antiquity, which is their archetype in the dimension of time. – I had a sense of poetry, but the unhappy ties that chained me to the poetic object in reality did not allow me to enjoy, in a higher state of being, what I in this world was ever to be without. – Gradually I reached the point where I realised that reality holds no joy for me. – I read Fichte's wonderful book on The Destiny of Man, Schiller's great dramas and his deep speculations. I left life with Schelling's dialogue Bruno. Now I had reached a point where I only needed an impulse to drive me to the antiquity of the North, to let me feel for it the same love that I always held for it, and with a clearer vision."

(*N.F.S. Grundtvigs Dag- og Udtagsbøger I ved Gustav Albeck* (1979) p. 401 f.)

The push he needed came when his indignation was roused by reading, what he considered, a factious treatment of Norse myth. He took up his pen to express the view of the Norse heroic past that had dawned on him. And he says:

"From now on I live in the heroic past, and reality will no longer be able to make me its slave."  
(*Ibid.* p. 402)

Grundtvig is hopeful that his absorption in the myths of the North will enable him to overcome his painful passion for the mistress of the household where he is employed as a tutor.

In Langeland Grundtvig wrote some short papers on Norse poetry and mythology, all of which are preludes to the main work of his romantic period, *Norse Mythology*. Presumably he wrote the better part of the book in Langeland and published it on his return to Copenhagen in 1808.

Grundtvig's *Norse Mythology* is for its time a scholarly achievement of distinction. The twenty-five year old author undertakes an important critical evaluation of the source material as he points to the lays of the

Edda – the body of poems on Norse gods and heroes dating from the tenth century and handed down in medieval Icelandic vellums – as the principal sources for our knowledge about ancient Scandinavian religion. So far scholars had predominantly relied on the prose tales about the gods penned by the Icelandic author Snorri Sturluson in the thirteenth century. With a starting-point in the visionary poem, the *Voluspá*, Grundtvig attempts to see Scandinavian religion as a pattern or plot in which the individual myths related in the poetic Edda are integrated. In the *Voluspá* – where a prophetess speaks of the origin of the world, the life and decline of the gods resulting in the Ragnarok when they perish in a final struggle with the giants, the forces of evil, but afterwards are reborn to immortal life in a purified world – Grundtvig sees the unfolding of “a drama of victory so wonderful as could possibly arise in the soul of a mortal poet.” For the *Voluspá* is to Grundtvig the work of a poet who, as he says:

— pondered on the origin of the world and time. — As any person in whom the divine spark can freely evolve, he easily rose to The Eternal, to the mysterious spring wherefrom everything must emanate. He looked around him with his deep vision to find an image of the glorious harmony to which he had risen, but he found nothing but conflict. — In constant struggle with earth, beasts and other humans he saw men stand firm, prevail and sink. If he lifted his failing eye towards the heavens, he saw light struggling with darkness and itself, and did he gaze into man's, his own inner self, then it seemed to him that all external strife was only a weak symbol of the one that shattered his own being.

His spirit threatened to throw away his sublime idea and shroud itself in darkness, but stirred fruitfully within him and a light was lit before the mind's eye. He saw the birth of the primordial giant Ymir. And now everything was clear. As wild, formless matter had itself taken on life, the Father of All, the supreme God, could not allow a world to arise, which in its smallest part bore a stamp of His image, before the evil, self-arrogated life had perished.

In order that this could happen, the divine force of the Father of All became manifest as living and active. It was what it had to be pure, blind and silent. But it only weakened the life of matter instead of destroying it, for by opening its eye it lost its purity. It built a world and would be independent. It made peace with matter, and even the feeling of a coming higher life would have been lost, if the wisdom of the Eternal had not severed the sinful bond, but that did occur, and Time became of necessity the expression of the struggle between unholy force and contaminated strength (that is between the giants and the gods, the *Æsir*).

In this way the mystery of existence was solved, and it could no longer surprise the poet when he saw that even the force that fought against infamy did it more for its own end than for the glory whose champion it ought to be. He did not reject his idea, for the wisdom that instigated and

governed the struggle, would also hereafter bring it to a stop by the mutual destruction of the forces of conflict themselves. When the sinful life of matter was annihilated, when the blind force, purified and devoid of will, had again joined with the eternal flow, he saw a day shine and a time unfold that was endless, and where strife was unthinkable, when everything had to see itself as rays of one sun.”

(*Nordens Mythologi* (1808) in *Grundtvig: Uvalgte Skrifter I* (1904), p. 333-34).

I do not think it is necessary to explain this long speculative passage in detail. Suffice it to point to the way Grundtvig's interpretation of the mythical poem becomes a foil for his existential conflict, and the eschatology of Norse religion a symbol of the romantic harmony towards which he was striving. It is interesting to see how deeply he is influenced by gnostic or neoplatonic ideas. He speaks of contaminated strength, emanated from the Eternal, and its final reunification with the eternal flow. Grundtvig probably absorbed this from Schelling's *Philosophie und Religion* (1804). Even in Langeland and in the middle of a war one kept in touch with the latest developments in European thought. Speaking of the gnostic elements, one wonders how Grundtvig felt about them when in the early 1820s he read and translated Irenaeus's tract, *Against the Heretics*, and found himself in agreement with the old church father's attack on the life-denying doctrine of the Gnostic sect.

Norse Mythology is both a scholarly and poetic work (a synthesis quite in keeping with romanticism). In his account of the career of the Norse gods, Grundtvig lays great stress on their fall. Prompted by his own erotic predicament, Grundtvig sees its cause in a sin of a sexual nature: the God Frey's infatuation with a woman, Gerd, of giant descent. This is described in the Edda lay of *Vegtamskvida*, which Grundtvig paraphrases in a chapter whose prose and poetry may be said to be the highlight of the Mythology. The sensual passion is damnable, but it is described with an intensity and glow that reveals the ambivalence of his tormented desire.

What Grundtvig finds in Norse religion is a revelation of religious truth as it is found in all religion, a drama of life ending in death and followed by rebirth, which is seen as a valid parallel to the Christianity of the gospel. After his return to orthodox Christianity, Grundtvig described this standpoint as syncretistic and dissociated himself from his *Norse Mythology*. It is, though, his first masterpiece and represents an important stage in his intellectual and existential development. It seems strangely alive, thanks to its personal character and inspired poetic quality. From a scholarly point of view the book is significant, too. Grundtvig breaks with the prevailing view of myth as symbolic explanations of

natural phenomena. His view of them as expressions of the moral values of pagan society is probably closer to the way myths are explained by modern anthropologists and historians of religion. Grundtvig also sounds strangely modern when he sees it as his task to see the Edda in its own light, something he does, however, in a very subjective way.

It is then well-deserved that Grundtvig earned recognition and praise for this work at the time, not only in Denmark, but also in Germany where the famous writer and thinker Friedrich Schlegel praised it and urged Grundtvig to give them more from the same barrel. His brother, August Wilhelm Schlegel, the celebrated translator of Shakespeare, brought a copy of a German translation of Grundtvig's *Mythology* with him as a *vademecum* when he travelled in Sweden in the company of Madame de Staël Holstein. Much later when on his first visit to England, Grundtvig made contact with a university don in a London boarding-house, the latter immediately identifies him as the author of the *Norse Mythology*.

Grundtvig followed up his *Norse Mythology* with two volumes of dramatic scenes with themes from the heroic legends found in the Edda and Saxo's *History of the Danes*. He wanted to show the literary world how the subject-matter and spirit of Norse legends could really be treated in modern poetry. He did not succeed, however; only the volume first published (which is the second in the scheme of the work) has its moments of poetic genius. The volume of 1811 reflects – to the detriment of its poetry – Grundtvig's changed view of Norse heroic life after his return to orthodox Christianity and after the crisis in 1810 to 1811. In the preface – dated 8th September 1811 – he confesses that he nearly burnt his manuscript, “as this idolatrous talk, even in the mouth of a pagan, seems to me offensive, and all worldly poetic endeavour a transgression.” He speaks of the outrage it is to place the wild strength of the heathen higher than Christian love, and blames himself that, even if his homecoming to Christianity ran parallel with his discovery of ancient Scandinavia, he often expressed himself “so wrongly and carelessly that it ill-suited a Christian.” In short, Grundtvig's *Asamania* – as he called it – was over. It took the sea change he underwent in the 1820s for him to return to Norse myth anew.

In 1832 Grundtvig was asked to revise his *Mythology* of 1808 for republication. Instead he produced an entirely new work, quantitatively on a much larger scale, much wider in its scope, and with a new and, as it turned out, far-reaching view of the meaning and function of myth in modern culture.

*Norse Mythology* of 1832 contains, as you probably know, in its long preface a chapter on Universal Historical Learning (translated in *Selected Writings* by N.F.S. Grundtvig edited with an introduction by Johannes Knudsen, Philadelphia 1976, Fortress Press), which may be described as Grundtvig's manifesto on culture and education. As I may remind you, it is here that Grundtvig makes his important distinction between Christian faith and Christian way of thinking, which opens on to his engagement in human culture independent of religious faith. It is also here he denounces classical learning and holds forth his programme for cultural enlightenment of the people transmitted by the living word. One element, and an important one, in the contents of the new education is myth, Greek and Norse myth. Grundtvig's present work is not a scholarly work, as his first *Mythology* in a sense was, but when that is said, it must also be put on record that there never was, or will be, a work on Norse mythology where so much knowledge about the subject has been brought together as in this volume, nor is it likely there has been, or will be, a mind with such a sovereign command of the sources, holding, as it were, all cross-references at the finger-tips. This needs to be said *vis-à-vis* the blatant errors and weird constructions that certainly also are to be found.

In the chapter of the long, long introduction to the *Mythology* with the heading *Myths and Mythology*, Grundtvig discusses the nature and function of myth and its place in the history and culture of a race. Myth is to Grundtvig intimately associated with the living word. Cultures without an oral mythical tradition, such as that of the Romans, Grundtvig classifies as artificial races or nations. To that class he must also – with regret – assign the Hebrew nation, since its writ is from a very early date, and the language is no longer alive. The principal natural nations are the Scandinavians and the Greeks. Their myths – so Grundtvig claims – derive from oral traditions and they supplement each other, as Greek myth reflects human nature and Norse myth human history. Grundtvig is given to such classifications and oppositions, often arranged in triads: humanity and nations pass through three stages, youth, maturity, and old age, which correspond to the elements of air, ocean, and earth, which again correspond to the mental faculties of imagination, feeling, and reason. It is easy to infer that these triads will correspond to Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modern Times. Gods, whether Scandinavian or Greek, are assignable to each division. It is probably very naughty and odious of me to say that this triadic speculative systematization reminds me of the German thinkers of whom Grundtvig was otherwise so critical. Grundtvig also considers the function of myth. He says:

"One might ask me what we need myths for, when we possess the Christian way of thinking? Why the clouds and the stars, when we have the sun and the moon?"

Firstly I must say that if we did not need the myths of Greece and Scandinavia, we still needed to understand them better than those of other races, because their influence has been on a universal historical scale and their literatures are the only original ones we have, so the languages were always inexpressible to us. But I am going to answer the question, as it so happens I can. As for the clouds, the sun itself would not be without them as long as it shines over the earth, and the moon is likely to want the stars around it, in particular such excellent constellations as the Seven Stars and the Charles' Wain. In other words: Christianity has no other special imagery than the unique parables of Our Lord and what derives from His life on earth, but this imagery belongs to the Church and the church school and only relates to our progress towards eternal life. We have, however, a career in time, which needs to be viewed in a spiritual light, and our souls as well as our bodies have temporal needs which our Maker wishes that we, with the light and the strength He gives us, must work for, for He does allow manna to fall as rain for His people in the desert, but not in a fertile land where they may sow and reap. The imagery or symbolic language of the Old Testament is without a doubt so striking and all-embracing, that if only we could acquire it, it would be in the land of insight as when the sun rises, but it will undoubtedly be too deep for us, and from the point of view of scholarship useless as long as Hebrew is a dead language. For myself I do not doubt that the time is approaching when that remains of this strange people and their tongue will be awakened from the grave like a Lazarus, but with this nation everything must ultimately, as from the beginning, happen in such an extraordinary way that, though we belong to the new people of God, which shall awaken the old, there is hardly any among us who has yet a feeling of how it is going to happen. Only this much is clear: the turn has now come for the imagery or symbolic language of Greece and the North, and that they will not only by enlivening our understanding of man and bringing beauty to our lives, will earn our gratitude, but they will also take us a giant stride towards illumination."

This quote is, of course, remarkable by containing a prophecy that came to pass, the revival of the Hebrew language and nation, but my reason for bringing it is its statement that myth can explain life. This is the essence of Grundtvig's new view of myths; they are not revelations of the Eternal as in his early Mythology, but may be used to gain insight into life in this world. In this connection it is worth noting the distinction Grundtvig here makes between the world of faith and existence in this world.

One quality of myth that is particularly important to Grundtvig is that the potentialities of the culture, to which it belongs, are contained in them. He says:

"If the myths of any people are the pleasing expressions of its spirit and proper temple for it, they must be prophetic, as far as they predict what might and ought to become of a nation, for in a sense any man's and, indeed, any poet's youth is prophetic, and as there will never become more of a person in a spiritual sense than what is found in the dreams and wishes of his youth, then we can know beforehand that the youthful dreams of two nations, that really developed to what the Greeks and the Norsemen became, must have a depth and richness, of which the mythologists, making them embodiments of their prosy thoughts, could have no idea."

Grundtvig here introduces the idea of the spirit of the people, which he took over from Herder. It is to Grundtvig a constant entity, unchangeable through the ages, and he is also convinced that there is an affinity between the individuals of any race at any time and their mythology, which should make it immediately attractive to them. This is an aspect of Grundtvig's thought we find it hard to grasp or accept, but which nonetheless is of the highest importance to his faith in the educational value of myth.

Against the background of the repudiation of the violence of the myths of the North, which Grundtvig made in 1811, it is natural that, as he makes a positive return to them in 1832, he should offer an apology on this score. That he does in the chapter of the introduction with the title, *The Heroic Spirit of the North*. He says:

"The Norse View of temporal life with Gods and men as a constant struggle, which must be fought as nobly and forcefully and wisely as can be, as all real peace that may befall the people of gods and the noble kin in the course of time, is born like a goddess of victory out of strife. This view must to a certain extent be found with any people that must maintain their independence and be given a chance of developing their strength, even in the most peaceful manner; that this has not died out in the North the present century has shown."

To Grundtvig, fighting is a condition of life. Of this he goes on to say:

"It must be clear to all of us that just as there can be no life in the particular view of the life of a people, if they do not fight with all their might for pursuing it against any foe, in the same way there can be no spirit in a language, if it does not vigorously resist all attempts at violating it. Similarly, there can be no life and spirit in the individual and his belief and ideas, if they do not strive to assert themselves in conflict with what cannot agree with them, so it is only a question of the way the conflict is fought out, that all accept the freedom that must be for all. And now I say that in spite of all obscurity and transgressions, human intelligence must admire, and the human heart rejoice in the heroic spirit of our fathers."

As he points to the idea of conflict as a positive value of the heroic life, Grundtvig also reads into the Norse myths the idea of freedom and tolerance we know from the famous dictum of freedom for both Loki and Thor.

In the Mythology proper Grundtvig gives an account in detail of the Norse pantheon, discussing its peculiar cosmogony, the role of the individual deities and their attributes. It would be more than flesh and blood could bear, if I attempted to go into this. Suffice it to say that Grundtvig deals with his dear gods in a way that is in marked contrast to the early Mythology. Here there is nothing of the solemnity and exaltation of the masterpiece of his youth. Grundtvig's account has a humorous note, in particular in the narration of the adventures of the gods. Most important in this work of 1832 is it that the author translates his symbols by saying what the mythical figures mean in abstract terms. For instance: the myth about Thor's fight with the giant Hrungnir is the Norse spirit's triumph over Roman culture and classical learning. Thor is the embodiment of truth and his hammer the living word! Othin is the spirit of poetry and the hope of victory, the two tribes of gods, the Asir and Vanir are respectively strength and love, Loki, the trickster god, is duplicity and cold reasoning, Balder is the glory of innocent life, Valhalla stands for immortal renown, the world tree is mankind and so on. I do not pretend that I find all these allegorizing interpretations equally striking and illuminating, some are rather bizarre and even insipid.

One of the more interesting applications of myth to human life is the interpretation of Ragnarok, the end of the world, which is given a prominent position in this Mythology, taking up the place allotted the fall of the gods in the first one, the fatal love of Frey for the giant girl. The events of Ragnarok correspond not only to a mythical cycle of life, death, and rebirth, but represent a recurrent pattern in history and the life of the individual. Myth has here the function of being a mirror, a quality, which above all makes it valuable for the clarification and illumination of life. When Grundtvig in this way attributes certain meanings and values to individual gods and mythical plots, he does so quite unconcerned with what the myths meant to the age from which they originated. Nor does he insist that his interpretation is definitive. He says about this:

"It does not matter what the myth-maker intended, if only what we attribute to the myth is good and fits well with it."

Undeniably this statement has opened gates wide for some odd

interpretations, both by Grundtvig himself and his disciples, but it says something that is obviously true about myth and fairy-tale. They are pluriscent, they have the capacity of being bearers of many meanings, as we know from the work of Freudians and Jungians.

Grundtvig published two other works on mythology, the notorious *Bragesnak* (poetic talk) (1844) and *Mythology for Youth* (1847). They do not add to what you find in the work of 1832. The one last-mentioned seems, however, to have been widely read.

But how important did mythology become to education in the folk high schools that were set up according to Grundtvig's educational ideas?

Chr. Flor, who founded the first folk high school at Rødding in 1844, was also the first to draw attention to Grundtvig's Norse Mythology in a review in a periodical, *Bragi og Idun* in 1839, and mythology entered into the curriculum of his school as long as it functioned till 1864. Other early schools practised it, besides Grundtvig's own high school at Marielyst, Morten Eskesen's school at Uth, and mythology was also taken up by Chr. Kold at Ryslinge. It was, however, at Askov that mythology became most prominent in the teaching of the school. Significantly, at the first open meeting at Askov in the autumn of 1865 there were three topics in the lecture programme: a lecture on the arrival of the goddess Ithun in Asgard, one on the state of the German language in Denmark in the eighteenth century, and a talk on spavin in horses. The mythological, the historical, and the practical!

The teacher who first and foremost used mythology was Ludvig Schrøder (1836-1908), and from his lectern a strong impulse went to other schools. Unfortunately Schrøder did not put his mythological talks in writing – on principle; perhaps, after all, they were the living word – and no report of them is known to me. Schrøder has, however, given an account of his practice in *Højskolebladet* 1879. Here he shows how he uses myths as images of the life of human personality and the life of the nation.

If Schrøder did not publish his mythological talks, others did. One example is *Oldsagn fra Norden* – ancient legends of the North – by Anton Nielsen (1886), but based on lectures given much earlier. Anton Nielsen (1827-1897) is a well-known and gifted writer about rural life, who also founded a folk high school at Vester Skerninge in Funen in 1868. Anton Nielsen does not seem to have told the myths himself, but to have read them out of one of the many mythological anthologies that appeared in the nineteenth century. Anton Nielsen's interpretations reflect the national and Christian ethos he wanted to instil into his pupils, with reference

to the love-goddess Freya he speaks about modesty in young women and warns against town manners and speech as well as foreign ways. One cannot say there is much enthusiasm and appeal in his commentaries.

But what was the effect of the mythological talks on those who listened? The Swedish Old Norse scholar, Lars Lönnroth, who has made a study of the role of mythology in folk high school education, claims that, with the exception of a few dedicated Grundtvigian families the mythological teaching had very little effect on the pupils. Against this you can hold the much quoted utterance by one N. Petersen Vittebjerg, who as an old farmer in 1936, fifty years after his stay at Askov Folk High School, declared: "It is with Norse myths, as I heard them in my youth from Ludvig Schrøder's mouth, that I have worked my land." And it is not the only testimony. Another you find in the interesting diary kept by Niels Nielsen, a carpenter and gymnastics instructor at Vallekilde Folk High School 1885-1886, and published by Roar Skovmand under the title *En Højskolevinter* (1968).

Here Niels Nielsen gives expression to the strong impression that Ernst Trier's spell-binding lectures made on him. In one entry he says:

"To-day Trier gave a talk or an interpretation of the painting over the entrance to the gymnasium, I have seen it so often and known what it represents so long, but never seen it so wonderful before, as it appeared before my mind's eye as he talked about it.

The picture shows Tyr placing his hand between the jaws of the Fenris Wolf. Now he developed how the wolf was a symbol of animal nature, which had risen when innocence, Balder, left the Asir, and then how the heavy chains cannot keep in check the animal and brutal side to man, but the bond that is hardly discernible can easily do it, this bond the will of love, is what holds us together; that applies to us in this school and to the individual and all society. Further he said that Tyr is the young god among the Asir, that means that it is youth that must bring sacrifices and make an effort to chain the monster. No, I cannot make it out the way Trier explained it to us."

Neither can I! What an innocent Trier seems to us in a post-Freudian age, and what unbearable implications are there not in animal desire being laid in chains at the sacrifice of a hand! It seems to us a castration myth, as Trier renders it, but that probably never occurred to any of those who listened to him at the time.

When Ludvig Schrøder became acquainted with the findings of modern mythological research questioning the genuine Nordic character of the traditional myths, he turned from them. That happened about the time when the romantic folk high school curriculum came under heavy

fire from young critical teachers such as Holger Begtrup and Jakob Knudsen during the famous fimbul-winter at Askov in 1881-1882. With Schrøder's enthusiasm gone, mythology was soon on its way out at other schools, and in 1889 a writer in the folk high school journal concludes: "The mythological age of the folk high school has come to an end. The Asir and the Giants have perished in the Ragnarok of realism."

Even though Schrøder returned to his beloved myths in his later years, mythology was generally dropped from the curriculum of folk high schools. The mythological age seemed remote, when in 1908 Holger Begtrup wishes for a revival of mythology based on the scholarship of the two outstanding folklorists, H. F. Feilberg and Axel Olrik. But this appeal did not meet with any response. After 1920 a revival was attempted when Aage Møller founded a folk high school at Rønshoved in the regained part of Schleswig in 1921. When uncertain about themes for lectures addressed to people, who for historical reasons had been cut off from Danish cultural life for some decades, he found to his surprise that talks on myths met with a response. Aage Møller, with Anders Nørgaard, started a revival, which meant a return to Grundtvig and the teaching in the early folk high schools. It would not be true today that he was successful or had a significant following within the folk high school movement. When Aage Møller published his *Nordiske Myter* in 1947, his school had closed down.

Little or nothing has been heard of mythology in the folk high school in recent years, and for all I knew, the mythological folk high school was dead. That I was wrong, was brought home to me early this year. The occasion was when Villy Sørensen, one of our leading writers, and existentialist and worthy disciple of Kierkegaard, brought out a book with the title *Ragnarok*. Here, with a subtle irony, of which he is a master, Sørensen retells the myth of Ragnarok giving it a slant pointing to the calamities of our modern age: the fear of an atomic holocaust, the arms race, and the division between the East and the West. Villy Sørensen has chosen to tell the story with sympathy with Loki, the god of ambivalence and reflection, and with the giants as symbols of the forces of nature. Villy Sørensen's book called forth a protest from two young folk high school teachers, proving that the mythological trend in the folk high school movement is alive and kicking after all.

The said teachers, Per Warming and Karen Marie Mortensen, point to the salient difference between Grundtvig and Sørensen: Grundtvig faces Ragnarok with humour and hope, Sørensen with irony and resignation. The latter, with his sympathy with the Giants and Loki, they claim, has



written an anti-myth. The following passage may be said to summarize their position:

"Grundtvig in his interpretation of myth draws a picture of existence as a struggle between good and evil, life and death, with something to fight for and something to fight against, and does it with a sense of humour and an attitude that is ursanctimonious in the midst of confusion, where no hands are clean, and where the outcome, yet, is in view, because myth holds a hope that springs from the knowledge that life is stronger than death. The Folk High School takes both life and death seriously, but believes in life. Villy Sørensen has a similar cause. He, too, is engaged, he does not want to close his eyes to Ragnarok either, but his solution is resignation, he speaks like a humanist pacifist of the Thirties."

Whether one agrees with Per Warming and Karen Marie Mortensen or not, there is such vitality, enthusiasm, and seriousness in their words that one must take it as evidence that mythology is still alive in the Folk High School, and, given such teachers, can be made relevant and topical in our modern age.

It makes one realize that whatever might be said about the vagaries of mythological interpretation in the folk high school – and more than sufficient has been said against it – Grundtvig's emphasis on myth and the living word brought two essential elements into the education at folk high schools, narrative and interpretation. We all know, some of us from experience, what masters of story-telling some of the old folk high school teachers were, and in myth they were in the early schools offered a genre that suited audiences of whom most were unfamiliar with reading books and a few even illiterate. Myth also invites interpretation, thus creating a situation for interaction between teacher and pupil. Interpretation comes natural to us. The German folklore scholar André Jolles once said: "Man has three fundamental activities:

Erzeugnis	the growing of crops
Schaffen	craftmanship
Deutung	interpretation."

This triad may be said to describe what the teaching is about in many folk high schools and related institutions. That Grundtvig through mythology made the third elementary human activity an essential thing in the schools shows his genius and lent to them a quality without which their tradition would have been infinitely poorer than it is.

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