Danish Folk High School and the Creation of a New Danish Man

Published by

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Christian Masculinity: Men and Religion in Northern Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries.

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In the middle of the nineteenth century a completely new institution, namely the Danish folkehøjskole or “folk high school” came into being.¹ The first of these schools was at Rødding, founded in 1844, and more and more folk high schools sprang up all over the country, especially in the period after 1864.² As a result of the great influence these schools had on Danish society and cultural life in the latter part of the nineteenth century, it seems self-evident to try to establish whether the form of masculinity they fostered was something new and uniquely Danish. Was a new Danish man created, in theory and in practice?³

The theoretical basis of my study is a perception of gender - masculinity as well as femininity - as a social and cultural construction, and thus subject to change according to time and place. Furthermore, it is taken as read that at any given moment a society can hold several masculinities, one perhaps being dominant. Masculinity is generally interpreted as a discourse, and this chapter presents a study of the emerging discourse and practice of masculinity in the Danish folk high schools, especially as it appeared in the writings of the circle around Ernst Trier (1837-1893), the founder and first principal of Vallekilde Folk High School, and one of the pioneers in the Danish

¹ Of the historians of the Danish folk high schools and the schools’ founding father, N. F. S. Grundtvig, the work of the American social anthropologist Steven M. Borish (The Land of the Living), and the British theologian A. M. Allchin (N. F. S. Grundtvig), and their analyses of a uniquely Danish phenomenon for an English-speaking audience, have been crucial in the preparation of this chapter.
² In 1862 there were 15 schools with barely 500 students. Between 1866 and 1869, 44 new schools were established. By 1875 there were 55 schools with almost 4,000 students (Borish, The Land of the Living, 193).
³ Ibid. Borish argues that “the high school man” was a new phenomenon, but he does not discuss the masculinity of this figure.
folk high school movement. He perceived himself as a man and a Christian, but how was his masculinity and Christian attitude interrelated? How did he “perform” his masculinity? And in which ways did he influence his students? These are the questions addressed in this chapter by considering Trier’s conception and performance of masculinity in the years 1863 to 1867, for not only was he among the first folk high school principals, he was also a key figure in the movement that during his lifetime resulted in the rapid spread of folk high schools in Denmark.

Trier was born into a wealthy Jewish family in Copenhagen, at a time when businessmen and members of the civil service were socially dominant. The city housed a large group of Jewish citizens, and Trier’s mother Bella was the daughter of one of the most influential Jews in town, Mendel Levin Nathanson. Nathanson was the leading figure in the efforts to gain full civil rights for the Jewish population in Denmark, which were obtained in 1814. Bella and her husband, the timber merchant Jacob Trier, had first had their children christened, and later followed by their own baptism. Ernst attended the most prestigious grammar school in Copenhagen, Metropolitanskolen, and on leaving studied theology at the university, a happy period in his life. Strongly attached to his mother, he lived at home, but took part in the student life of the city together with his many friends.

Bella wished her son to become a clergyman. He graduated in divinity in 1863 but did not enter the church. As he wrote to his fiancée, life in a vicarage would not suit him. He wanted to be where new paths would open before him. His youth was marked by his friendships with other young men from the same social stratum, academics and artists, who were extremely dear to him. In the Scandinavian students’ milieu he met with kindred spirits, especially young Norwegians, with whom he remained friends for life. Trier had a gift for friendship, and was never happier than when introducing a new acquaintance to his large, hospitable, and lively home.

Trier did not lead much of a wild life as a student, and instead enjoyed the fraternity of like-minded men. In the summer holidays he went walking with friends in the Danish countryside, and it was on one such expedition to Schleswig in 1860 that he and two friends met the young Georg Brandes, who was later to become the standard-bearer of modernism in Denmark, and one of the most outspoken critics of Christianity. In 1860 he was just a young student like Trier, and when their paths crossed he gave a vivid picture of Trier in his diary. Brandes wrote: “At Egebæk I jumped out of the carriage together with Ernst Trier, Nørregaard and Bågø. I did not regret having made the acquaintance of these three men, each of them vigorous, open and fine natures of the same race; all men of feeling, adoring each other, Ernst Trier probably being the most gifted person, full of warmth and fervour, friendly and open to strangers.”

In 1863 Trier volunteered for the army and was appointed as clerk to an army chaplain. On his return to Copenhagen he took up teaching at a teachers’ training college. It was during the Second Schleswig War that he was seized with the thought of setting up a folk high school, and in the years to come he worked constantly on

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the realisation of this plan, which involved a great deal of travel to advertise his school project. In 1865 Vallekilde Folk High School was opened, with Trier as its first principal, a position he held until his death in 1893. In 1863 he had become engaged to Marie Abel, the daughter of a rural dean in Funen, and during the four years of their engagement - the period studied here - they corresponded several times a week. They were married in 1867, and Marie took her place in the school as the principal’s wife. She died in 1873, having born three daughters, of whom Sigrid later married Poul Hansen, Trier’s successor as principal of Vallekilde. In 1876 Trier married Julie Marstrand, daughter of the industrialist Troels Marstrand.

DANISH FOLK HIGH SCHOOLS

In the second half of the nineteenth century the Scandinavian countries became notable for their development of tertiary education, and Denmark was first in the field. The Danish folk high schools were a part of the Grundtvigian movement, so called after its leader, the famous poet, theologian, and politician N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783-1872). The work of Grundtvig and his follower Christen Kold in establishing the Danish folk high schools was encouraged by the disastrous war of 1864, in which Denmark lost the provinces of Schleswig-Holstein to Prussia and some 6,000 Danish soldiers were killed. After the war there was a general feeling in Denmark that “What has been lost without must be won within”, and that this was a call best met through education. Denmark turned to the folk high schools as national institutions that no military defeat could harm; the aim of the schools was not further military armament or to plan acts of revenge over the Germans but to strengthen the love for Denmark. The movement grew apace. The original school at Rødding, founded in 1844, was moved to the village of Askov across the newly drawn national border between Denmark and Germany, where the school flourished under its principal, Ludvig Schröder. The impact of the schools on the psychology of the Danish people helped them recover from the dent to their national pride.

Folk high school was a new kind of educational establishment, a small residential school intended for young adults - at the beginning only young men, but soon also young women. As most of the young people came from the peasant population, the courses were adapted to the rhythms of farming, so that the young men were at school from November to April, and the young women from May to July. The schools were without examinations. Initially they were financially independent, but as time went by they began to receive government grants.

The first folk high schools prospered for a variety of reasons. The majority of the Danish population still lived in rural areas, most of them farmers, which meant the schools had a large pool of potential students. The first half of the nineteenth century had been a period of transformation in the wake of the Land Reforms (1784-99), with old village communities changed because many farmers had moved their farms out of the villages, thereby weakening the traditional solidarity between peasants. Moreover, 1848-49 saw the end of absolute monarchy and the birth of constitutional monar-

5 Buk-Swienty, Slagtebænk Dybbøl 18. april 1864.
chy, which meant that it now became possible for most men to participate in politics and to gain influence - which left them in even greater need of education.

Most of the new schools openly avowed Lutheran Christianity as their foundation, and even if the challenges of modernism were strong from the 1880s on, the Christian view of life remained the basis of school life. Whether as a taught subject or as a school ethos, religion was always present. Even if Scandinavians generally tended to be private about their faith, the students came under steady Christian influence in their daily lives. This was evident in the singing of hymns every morning and evening, grace at meals, and the texts written by Christian authors that were read aloud to the students. Churchgoing was optional, but many students chose to attend. Of the first schools, several were more openly Christian and included religious tuition in their programme. In the present context, however, my focus will be on one of the classic Grundtvigian schools that upheld this tradition from the very outset, and which put its stamp on folk high school culture.

The two fathers of the Danish folk high school movement, Kold and Grundtvig, did not agree on the teaching of Christianity. Unlike Kold, Grundtvig thought that religious instruction should be given at home and not at school. Yet neither of the men, famous and influential in the history of Danish education, had any doubt as to the importance of the Christian faith in human life, and it was partly thanks to the Danish folk high schools that Lutheran Christianity in Denmark resisted and survived the influence of modernism. During the waves of religious revival in the first half of the nineteenth century, pietistic attitudes and practices were widespread in the country, and it was from people devoted to these ideas that the schools inspired by Grundtvig met with opposition.

**TRIERS AND GRUNDTVIG**

At an early age Trier met Grundtvig, heard him preach, and came to know him personally, all of which made a great impression on him. Grundtvig’s encouragement was crucial for Trier’s decision to establish a folk high school rather than a boys’ school, as had been his plan earlier. In the 1860s Grundtvig was a man of high standing. He was almost idolised by supporters, young and old, who gradually became known as the Grundtvigians. Since 1839 Grundtvig had been chaplain of the church in Vartov, an old alms-house in Copenhagen, where people flocked to attend Divine Service and join the vigorous singing of hymns of which Grundtvig had written a great many. He himself had established a folk high school, but was of the opinion that the schools should be dispersed across the country, and he thought north-west Zeeland, where Trier wanted to begin, was a suitable place.

Trier had become fully acquainted with Grundtvig’s ideas by listening to his sermons at Vartov. However, before that in the early 1860s, he and some friends, including Schröder, had attended a series of talks on the history of the Church given by Grundtvig in his own home, arranged by Trier. Some of Grundtvig’s most important new ideas had been formulated much earlier, but it was not till now, however, that

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they became properly recognised, while to Trier and many other young people they meant a new view on life. This was very much the case with Grundtvig’s mageløse Opdagelse (unparalleled discovery) in 18257, his realisation that Christianity existed before the New Testament and that the Christian Church was grounded in the apostolic confession of faith and in the sacraments. Grundtvig saw the Church as a unity in space and time, without a gulf between past and present. The Church was to him a community of faith, implying that we are all living members of a historic communion in which all who are initiated have a vital part to play, and, crucially, that the congregation is more important than the clergy. He saw Christianity as a fact of history, which created an empowering contact with all the great men and the great events of the past, and in the last resort with “the power from on high”, which works in and through it all.8 Another important point was that individuals do not exist in isolation, that we move within the stream of history, and arrive at the truth by way of the history of which we are part. Grundtvig pointed out that we must act not only for our own good, but for the benefit of our country, and that Christianity points beyond the ego and leads us towards our obligations to other people, and to the love that is meant to embrace us all.9

7 Allchin, N. F. S. Grundtvig, 105.
8 Ibid., 107.
Another of Grundtvig’s central ideas was that the folk high school should centre on “enlightenment for life”. What this meant was that an understanding of the deep truth that constitutes enlightenment never comes from rote learning of set texts. Facts and theories are no substitute for true enlightenment, which can only be taught by life itself. A dialogue based on mutual respect is central to enlightenment, and should be used to develop a basis for community feeling and, from the point of view of the individual, develop self-confidence, authority, and the ability to conduct a dialogue, which is a necessary prerequisite for active participation in political life.

Grundtvig fought against the form of education that was wholly reliant on books and scholarship, and was determined that the teaching at the folk high schools should be marked by the use of the Living Word, in stories, song, and dialogue. The students should never be tested, but what was offered to them through the Living Word should be received with heart and soul. The new Denmark should not be based on people from the elite but on the peasantry. They should be the hearts of the nation. In the decade before 1864 it had become obvious just how disastrous it was when the academic elite held political power. The question was now whether the peasants would be strong, willing, and courageous enough to defend their mother tongue and native land. It was the folk high schools that would see to that.

Trier’s second source of inspiration was Christen Kold, who hit upon the idea that school should be like home. The implication was that students would return home without having acquired a taste for a more refined way of life, with better food and more comfortable beds. Schools should instead be similar to farms, and adopt the hierarchical structure with the husband at the head of the table. For this reason, the patriarchalism of the schools did not invite a radical change of gender roles.

TRIER’S MASCUtLINITY

How did Trier view his own masculinity and its interrelationship with the Christian religion? To answer this I have chosen to study his correspondence with his future wife Marie during their engagement, 1863 to 1867, supplemented by Trier’s memoirs, published after his death, and various books about him written by friends and acquaintances. In his many long and heartfelt letters to Marie, Trier gives a detailed account of his daily life and doings, his thoughts and feelings. The letters indicate how he wanted to present himself to his fiancée and how he understood himself. The two young people had not been acquainted for long when their correspondence began, and during the period of their engagement there would be months in which they did not meet. Trier presumably wished to appear to her as the man he wanted
to be, just as she tried to appear to him in a way that accorded with her own ideas of what she should be like. Both were intelligent and observant, able to shape ideal from practice. Trier did not think of himself as a good writer; he was a better speaker. The letters were written for their own eyes only, although they often mention in their correspondence that private letters written by family members were shown to others.

Trier was probably unaware of his own masculinity and that of others if you apply the criteria used by modern research. No doubt he had his own ideas of masculinity, of true men, and also a feeling that being a man did not mean the same in all the various social strata of his day. The most exciting thing about studying Trier is the fact that - without putting the actual process into words - he formed a new masculinity for himself and his young male students through his life and work at the folk high school. He, the son of a well-off Jewish merchant in Copenhagen, moved to the country and set out to teach young peasants, and, perhaps most sensationally, dropped his bourgeois manners and found a new way of life with the peasants. He, a university-educated man, dedicated his life to the education of a very different class of young men and women in order to encourage them to serve the common good. Gender was at stake here, and in what follows I shall focus on the masculinity or masculinities of the men involved, both of Trier and of his students. How was a new masculinity envisaged and performed? What were its characteristics and its relationship to Christian faith? Let us start by looking at the various roles in which Trier performed his masculinity. We shall meet him as a friend, potential husband, and practising member of a Christian community, and soon-to-be principal of his school at Vallekilde.

The milieu of Trier’s youth was marked by his relationships with fellow students and friends - a homosocial milieu. In those days, fraternity, men’s relationships with men, were social phenomena just as important as marriage and men’s relationships with women. For Trier the defining fellowships were formed in connection with his studies, with his fight for spiritual values such as “Danish Christianity”, history, art and culture, and also in connection with his dreams of how these values could be realised to the benefit of the Danish people. His sheer joie de vivre made him one of the leading lights in his circles of friends and fellow students. He and some of his fellows shared a wish to raise the tone in the students’ associations, both in Samfundet (The Society) and the so-called Store Theologicum (Large Theologicum). This resulted in the formation of Lille Theologicum (Little Theologicum) in 1858, a group of the very close friends, most of them theologians, well known since because so many of the young men became pioneers in the development of the folk high schools, among them Ludvig Schrøder and Johannes Nørregaard as principals of Askov and Testrup.

Trier often mixed his artist friends, such as the composers August Winding and Emil Hartmann, with his fellow students, to the delight of all. His enthusiasm for people brought out the best in people. Trier seems to have put much of his natural cheerfulness into his own dreams about the future as well as sharing it with his young male friends, especially those with similar plans and interests. At a party for artists

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14 Schrøder, Ernst Trier, 80.
16 Hansen, Højskoleforstander Ernst Trier, hans æt, 95.
17 Schrøder, Ernst Trier, 84.
and students in 1859, Trier’s enthusiasm for the Norwegian students present, especially one named Lyng, found expression in a song written for the occasion: “This is why Lyng is his bosom friend; he is just one of the real men.”

Beyond doubt, these young men influenced one another’s ideas and practices as far as masculinity was concerned. They had been brought up with the old-fashioned bourgeois virtues to become active citizens, trustworthy, industrious, and determined Danish men. Trier’s schoolmate, the future politician and solicitor at the Supreme Court, Octavius Hansen, son of the merchant ‘English Hansen’, tried to bring Trier round to his aristocratic ideals and to adopt the manners of a self-made gentleman, practising riding, dancing, and fencing, but Trier was uninterested in acquiring this culture. He felt most at ease with his friends in Lille Theologicum. They were united in a common pursuit, as he put it in a letter of 4 May 1866. As a fellow countryman, democrat, and a follower of Grundtvig, his chosen purpose in life was to “tear down the partitions between all believers and build up a wall between belief and disbelief”, and “to tear down partitions erected by foreign influence in Danish education to uphold class differences”.

Emotionalism, the sensitivity, tears, and embraces between men, were thought very much in evidence in this period, which held as principal virtues the prevalent masculine ideals of courage, stoical calm, and self-control as well as a Romantic, eroticised sensibility. Trier was a cheery man with a loud laugh, but the strong man was as tender as a woman. In his letters he told Marie that there were times when he himself had been profoundly moved, and he also noted when this was the case with other men. When he took leave of his home on his departure for Valleklede, many tears were shed. While working as a clerk to the army chaplain in 1864, Trier became part of the military community, and later gave a detailed account of his activities in his autobiography. He never saw action, and spent most of his time on active duty on the central island of Funen, where some of the troops were stationed. Both in service and after the war he showed his feelings for the soldiery. According to his letters, the war was a heavy memory, and he was moved when he talked to injured soldiers in the camp hospital at Frederiksberg Palace. He wanted people to respect and honour their bravery. His pain and dejection after the tragic defeat at Dybbøl were not only prompted by the horrible injuries and loss of life, but also by the loss of Southern Jutland, and above all by the loss of honour. This was the prevailing feeling in the country, “the traumatic fever of Dybbøl” - surely they should have kept fighting rather than bow to German might.

Life at the school also left room for feelings. Trier wished daily life could be a life of love. He loved his students, they loved him - and tried to love one another, with varying degrees of success. In his letters to Marie he told her frankly about his favourite student. He also gave an account of a conflict between two students, which called

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18 Schrøder, Ernst Trier, 4.
19 Hansen, Højskoleforstander Ernst Trier, 28.
20 Thrane, Tusmørkemesteren, II, 191.
21 Viggo Pedersen’s introduction to Trier, Efterladte, 14-15.
22 Trier, Brevveksling, 95.
23 Ibid., 33, 41-42, 47.
forth tears on both sides, evoked by sorrow as well as joy. When, in April 1866, Trier was going to part with a group of young male students, his heart was in his mouth and there was weeping. When he was going to part with his good friend Pastor Hoff, the latter “flung his arms round my neck and kissed me”.

Manifestly there was no risk in a man kissing and hugging other men. The norm for masculine behaviour allowed for the display of a broad spectrum of feelings. Research on the subject has pointed out that up to about 1850 the unrestrained cultivation of romance and sentimental feelings, sobbing and declarations of love, were perfectly compatible with the dominant ideal of masculinity. Gradually it became more important to demonstrate one’s absolute independence of others, and physical as well as mental strength became the ideal. Intimacy between men was not yet understood as homosexuality, and this attitude offered male friends a liberty that would later disappear.

From 1863 Trier began to prepare himself for his post as principal of a folk high school, and as the breadwinner in his marriage to Marie. However much he wanted to get married, he wanted to set up house for himself first so as to provide for her in a satisfactory way. The outlook might not be particularly bright, but he felt certain it could be done. Marie’s father, Dean Abel, would not countenance handing his daughter over to an insecure future. The wedding had to wait until everything was in place. In several letters Trier referred to the work of his manhood, which has now begun. What made him a man is his independent position, with responsibilities and command of his own personal finances. He had at first been supported financially by his father through his education, and later with the folk high school, yet this was never a precondition. Neither his betrothal nor his marriage will make him a man, but this was a consequence of his independent position. The essential point for Trier was that the school belonged to him, and that nobody had the right to interfere.

Did Trier then conceive of Christianity and its practices as gendered? In order to answer this question it seems relevant to return to Grundtvig to consider his attitude to gender and women, as Trier may have been inspired by his ideas. In 1851 Grundtvig had written a review of the first feminist novel in Denmark, *Clara Raphael. 12 breve*, written by Mathilde Fibiger under pseudonym. In the review, which appeared in Grundtvig’s own periodical, *Danskeren*, he expressed his attitude to gender very...
clearly. The novel is about a young governess and her rebellious thoughts provoked by her encounter with a sleepy, and pietistic, rural milieu. Unlike its other reviewers, Grundtvig was not scared by Fibiger’s emancipatory ideas, which were extremely advanced for 1850; instead he backed her up, and continued to do so even after the publication of her second novel, of which he absolutely disapproved. In his review of the first novel, he characterised it as “a small, happy book, readable, human, Danish and feminine”. Grundtvig emphasised that both man and woman are human beings, “created in God’s image to pursue truth and to agree about Earth in order to agree so much the better with Our Lord about Heaven”. Women as well as men have their inalienable human rights. Grundtvig praised the struggle of the protagonist, the shield-maiden Clara, and through her the authoress. He found the novel Danish “in pen, voice and kindness of heart”; qualities dear to the Old Bard, as Danes loved to call him.

To Grundtvig, men and women were of a different nature, but equal. Even more important was his statement that both sexes have a male and a female part. In his view, female values such as love and mildness had been suppressed in men, just as male values such as courage and authority had been suppressed in women. That being in which the male and the female parts were united was to Grundtvig an expression of the truly human. The feminine nature was to his mind only to be esteemed. In his own words, “woman with her heartfelt understanding will secure the connection between the free spiritual flight of man and her own deep-rooted existence”. The upgrading and encouraging of femininity wherever it was found, not to mention improvements to the prospects for women in society, were aspects of Grundtvig’s project for freedom and reform. Grundtvig’s ideas were very radical when they were launched, coming as they did before the translation into Danish of John Stuart Mill’s work. His high opinion of femininity did not have a major impact, however, and many years would pass before women in Denmark reached the goals he had dreamt of on their behalf. The first “high school men”33 perceived men and women as very different creatures in spite of their common humanity. For this reason, it was thought young men and women should be addressed in different ways34, and gender-segregated education was the norm, maintaining the proper conduct of the sexes.35

Turning to Trier, to understand his performance as man we must look to his life as an active member of a Christian community. Before leaving Copenhagen, Trier preferred to attend the church at Vartov for divine service, where he could join in the enthusiastic hymn-singing and feel himself part of Grundtvig’s congregation. Belonging to Vartov was important for him. In a letter of 8 January 1865 he gave an enthusiastic account of a service there, at which the queen dowager, Caroline Amalie, was present, as was often the case. She generally went to communion in private, which was the custom at court, but “today she completely broke with this Chinese etiquette” and “all alone, without a single lady-in-waiting she knelt down among everybody else and took the body and blood of Our Lord together with them. Next to her was a

33 Borish, The Land of the Living, 193.
34 Schrøder, Ernst Trier, 54.
35 Damsholt, “Hans og Karen på højskole”, discusses the gendered model for students at the folk high school.
peasant girl and behind her some training-college students and an old tailor with his wife. So you see, people from all walks of life. A happy sight indeed!”

The tearing down of barriers between human beings in church was one of his deepest wishes. “As Christians we are not individual persons but a community sharing all the good things in life”, he wrote on 18 June 1865. At a moment when he was running out of steam because of his mounting problems with setting up the school, a vicar called Hoff, whom he met during the war, paid him a visit, a moment that gave Trier courage because he felt that in spite of their rather brief acquaintance they were bound together by their common faith.

During their engagement Marie lived at home at Dalum, but she spent one winter and a number of holidays with her future parents-in-law in Copenhagen. She wrote to Trier that she would very much like to take communion with him at Vartov when he next comes to stay. But he refused to promise anything. Communion, he said, was a serious matter and the very act was more important to him than her company, so it would be at a time and place on his own choosing.

Trier wrote openly to Marie about his problems, even when verging on crisis. He was often overworked, reading, teaching and - after 1864 - working at Vallekilde. Showers and fresh air improved his physical well-being, but his spiritual condition was a more serious problem. It took away his cheerfulness. In his letters he told her that prayer was his only comfort and that praying restored him to strength, courage, and joy. His crises can hardly be described as religious scruples - they were entirely of an existential nature.

Yet at times he asks Marie to pray for him, and through prayer a crisis is overcome on 3 March 1865.

What does all this tell us about Trier’s masculinity and Christianity? Trier never made a secret of his Christian faith, but in general he did not proselytise either. Religious life was for him a private matter. Not all his friends from his youth were Christians, and he did not refrain from trying to influence them, and sometimes he succeeded in doing so, while the Christian faith was something that was taken for granted in the local community of Trier’s school at Vallekilde; but daily life was marked by conflicts with the Pietists, who were later to be organised in Indre Mission (Inner Mission). Under all these circumstances Trier stood firm, never faltering in his presentation of himself as an independent, confident, and dignified man. The idea of a feminisation of religion discussed in several contributions in this volume was no problem for Trier, and his Christian faith could in no way be perceived as feminine, either by himself or by others.

Neither does Trier seem to have felt it necessary to hide his Jewish descent, be it in his childhood and his youth, or during the building of the school. When teaching at Vallekilde he emphasised that the important history of his people, the Jewish people, was told in the Old Testament, and his talks to the students on this theme were very impressive, according to Viggo Petersen, who was married to Trier’s niece. Petersen...
wrote of Trier that “he was a friend of the Lord like Abraham, and of the same blood”.\textsuperscript{41} Trier conceived of himself as “a Hebrew”. He loved his people and its heritage, but still, proud scion of the Patriarchs though he was, he loved Denmark and was grateful to the Danish people. In a letter to Marie of 17 June 1866 he wrote: “May God protect Denmark, our peaceful country, that it can be to us what the Land of Goshen was to the children of Israel during the plagues of Egypt”.\textsuperscript{42} The songbook used at the school after 1870, with its selection made by Trier, contains many of Grundtvig’s songs about major events in the Old Testament; however, the number of songs treating events in the New Testament is much larger.\textsuperscript{43} Trier’s faith and Christian mind must have been so convincing that for those around him his Jewishness became an irrelevancy.

**THE PRINCIPAL**

Trier started his school from scratch; the scholar was put to work. He began by hiring rooms at a farm where he could teach and have a room of his own. He soon purchased land, had the school built, and went on to purchase farmland and livestock, and had a garden laid out.\textsuperscript{44} From 1865 till Marie’s arrival in 1867, he worked hard to get the school up and running. The most important part of this was to find students and maintain contact with potential supporters. Trier travelled in all weathers, either on foot or bumping along in an uncomfortable carriage drawn by tired horses; and he achieved his purpose. He obtained financial support from his father, and often received gifts from high and low, but at first he had to struggle to make ends meet. He was proud to have saved money by finding a bargain, and rejoiced in the prospect of being able to provide Marie with wool from his own sheep. He dressed modestly and wore clogs in the yard - but did not make a virtue of wearing worn and weird peasant clothes like one of his models, Christen Kold at Dalum.\textsuperscript{45}

Taking home as their model, everyone at the school lived on largely equal terms. Students and teachers shared the same rooms, ate porridge out of the same bowl, and wore wooden clogs and homespun clothes. This was difficult for some of the many guests who came to the school. When the famous Norwegian author Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson visited Vallekilde, he found some adjustments to the new lifestyle a problem. Faced with the prospect of eating out of the same bowl as the young peasants, Bjørnson exclaimed: “No my dear friend, this will not do!”\textsuperscript{46} Trier’s old father also resented this practice, and tried in vain to win over his daughter-in-law to the idea of individual bowls by saying: “You may well run a school for peasants but all the same...”

\begin{itemize}
  \item Pedersen, “Om Ernst Trier”, 8-10.
  \item Trier, Brevveksling, 198.
  \item Id., *Sange for den kristelige folke-skole*.
  \item Trier’s work, which included physical labour, apparently did not come in for ridicule from the locals; cf. Anna Prestjan’s account of the Swedish clergyman Erik E. Hammar, “En korsfäst främling på jorden?”, 161.
  \item Engberg, *Historien om Christen Kold*, 282; Allchin, *Grundtvig*, 167-169, gives an account of Kold’s school.
  \item Hansen, *Højskoleforstander Ernst Trier* (1933), 237.
\end{itemize}
[you might] try to get closer to the rest of the civilised world.” Marie, ever the loyal wife and demonstrating that women could be just as steadfast as men, refused to give in. That said, even she had her limits, and asked to have spittoons in the house.

Beauty was valued highly by Trier - he loved flowers and had an eye for colour - but he despised luxury and looking after one’s own comfort. The home that was the model for the school was the farmhouse, not the manor with its special culture and ways of life, which the peasants had better keep away from. “We should set fire to our sophisticated manners and do without mahogany furniture, roasts, and cake”, he wrote to Marie in 24 February 1867. He told her in a letter of his new lifestyle at Vallekilde, which meant that he did not have a sofa and hardly ever used his rocking chair.

Was the teaching in the folk high school gendered, and if so, in what way? Through Trier’s letters to Marie we get a fine insight into both the teaching and daily life at Vallekilde. The students were taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, but what was more important was the instruction given as fordrag, talks or lectures. Trier and his teachers gave talks on themes from history and mythology in such a way that the audience of young farmers not only hung on every word, but could easily relate their message to what was happening in their own lives, then and there in Denmark. Underlying the presentations was the Grundtvigian message: throughout the history of Denmark, heroes had fought to improve the lives and conditions of their people, and now the students were placed in a direct line to inherit this good tradition. Trier chose men from the Danish past such as Niels Ebbesen, Beowulf, King Skiold, and Offa. He adopted Grundtvig’s understanding of Northern mythology as an inspiration for Danish Christians, interpreting mythology as a form through which the heathen ancestors had tried to formulate their understanding of life in a kind of Nordic Old Testament - a premonition of Christianity, an anticipation of the Christian view of life as a battlefield for the fight between life and death. The mythological figures could be used as examples of the existential choices that face humankind in the great questions of life. Trier himself had attended grammar school, and had been educated to hold his own in a world of academics who felt superior to Denmark’s local history and national culture. In contrast, his aim was to prepare his students for life in a specific historical and geographical context.

Group singing was an essential part of school life. There was Morning Song and Evening Song, and group singing both at the beginning and at the end of each class as well as at meals. In their spare time students were encouraged to sing together. It was through song that major historical events and events from Scripture could be taught and learned, easily sliding into the mind, and patriotic songs, sung together, had a strengthening effect and brought joy to all. Moreover, group singing bound the young people to each other. Nobody sang solo, all sang together; unison, not partsong, was the order of the day. At times Trier would accompany them on the piano.

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47 Ibid., 252.
48 Trier, Brevveksling, 280.
49 Ibid., 107.
50 Borish, The Land of the Living, 195; for Christian heroes, see Alexander Maurits and Tine van Osselaer in this volume.
A few of his composer friends, such as August Winding, contributed with settings of new poems Trier wanted to introduce to his students.

In order to get the full benefit from their stay at the school, it was imperative that the students attended voluntarily, ready to receive enlightenment. The students, Trier and the other teachers were in one another’s company almost round the clock. The force of example was great, just as the example set by the community had a strong impact. Trier had a clear idea of the goals for his school, and his influence on the students worked more indirectly than directly. He taught them through stories and songs, investing his whole personality, rather than giving admonitory speeches and instructions. He wanted to lead, just as he attached great importance to the freedom of his students to find their own way. Until he married in 1867, the school constituted the home and the family he so looked forward to.

The word, the spoken word, the Living Word, was of central importance in school life, and naturally the use of the Danish language was essential. Trier was also particularly given to the pervasive use of body language and language of the heart, of expressions of emotions such as tears, hugs, and kisses. No man at Vallekilde shrank from this practice. Trier was famous for tickling and hugging his students, for letting them have the opportunity to jump and skip, dance and play with each other in the classrooms. From January 1867 he made arrangements for gym lessons every Saturday for the young men.

Did Trier wish to inculcate his male students with his own newly created ideal of masculinity, and did he succeed? I believe so, but it was an ideal he formed himself. He and his young students broke with tradition when performing their masculinity; they, in particular, broke with the general image of peasants as being dull, slow, and sceptical of everything new. Now, liberated in body and mind they could stand tall and hold their heads high because they had new tenets to live by and a new goal in life. They had become responsible members of the Danish populace, and more independent in relation to their homes. Trier discarded his role as a bourgeois scholar and threw himself into his new life among the peasantry. He refused to imitate them, but neither did he take with him the fashionable manners and attitudes of town life. His strength was an authority from within. It has been said of him that his power over the minds of young people was due to his wholehearted dedication. He was a leader with great charm and a forceful personality, spell-binding, impulsive, and warm; almost always able to let go of his self-control, yet always equal to the occasion.

52 Hvidt, Folkestyret i tiår og tegninger, 14.
53 Viggo Pedersen in Trier, Efterladte, 13-14.
VISIONS OF FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY

Trier never explicitly refers to his own masculinity, or that of others’, so as a gloss masculinity is non-existent in his letters. One might expect to find Trier’s conception of masculinity expressed in his relationship to Marie, as he may have wanted to stress his masculinity at least in that quarter, but it seems to have been taken so much for granted that it becomes invisible in his letters. His ideas of femininity, however, are explicitly stated and they may indirectly give us an impression of his ideas of masculinity. Trier and Marie are of very different temperament. According to him, “stillness is the most conspicuous aspect of her nature”, and just as characteristic of her as restlessness, loud language, and gesture are of him. He sees himself as a sanguine person, almost choleric, but this difference is not necessarily gendered.

In his letters Trier appears to be giving guidance to his very young fiancée, but never reproof. He instructs her on Christian religion and other matters. As a theologian and as a man he feels called upon to instruct her in the Christian faith, and she expects him to do so and likes to be instructed. However, she maintains her freedom to receive his instructions at her own pace and to make her own decisions. Trier refers to a situation in which “she laid her soft hand on my mouth and said wait”. She does not shrink from stopping him when she has heard enough. In his letters to her, Trier gives way to his dreams and expectations. In 18 January 1865 he wrote:

I picture you as a lovely, sweet, earnest little lady of the house who truly crowns it all by your quietness; how the students are delighted with you and smile at you, when you, in the morning, enter the school in order to listen to the morning’s talk, bringing your needlework, or in the evening invite them to come in to see you. So you shall be my loving friend, my joy, she who in deep sincerity shares everything with me and gives strength and encouragement.

Trier respects her father’s decision not to give her away just like that, but insists he will marry her and is confident that he will be able to provide for her - and he wins. He is pleased with her patience and faithfulness, but also with her self-dependence. During a stay in Copenhagen she visits Grundtvig and his wife, and when she tells Ernst about her speaking her mind in the discussion between their guests, Trier rejoices in this. She is a thoughtful and cheerful girl with a mind of her own, but deeply in love with and fascinated by her fiancé. She writes to him that she hopes to be able to live up to him, and that she wants to make him complete. They are to share everything in their marriage but both shall rule.

In his letters to her Trier makes no secret of his feelings for other people. We may say that the letters express less of his feelings for her than for others, mostly men.

54 Trier, Brevveksling, 37.
55 Ibid., 35.
56 Trier, Femogtyve, II, 35.
57 Id., Brevveksling, 34.
58 Ibid. 54. Marie uses the word fyldestgøre (complete) in a very unusual way here. She may mean either that she hopes to make him complete, or that she hopes to satisfy him.
Sexuality is not a theme that is addressed in the correspondence. Their relationship is marked by innocence, in just the same way as the relationships between Trier and his friends. The happy cheerfulness of the folk high school and its whole way of life are full of joy, expressed through singing, reading, bunting, festivities, speeches, flowers, and cake. Trier lets Marie’s portrait pass round among the young men when they hear about her after she has sent apples to the school. They send her greetings in return. Naturally the total suppression of sexuality must have been a problem for some of the young people at the school, probably increasingly so as the century progressed. Generally, however, the students expected life at school to verge on the monastic, without close contact with the opposite sex. School was a home in which the tone was different from that in the public sphere.

Trier wanted to bring Marie into his new world, and she prepared for it by spending the summer of 1866 at Askov, the folk high school of which Trier’s friend, Ludvig Schrøder, was the principal. She was a student, but at the same time she took the chance to learn the management of a rural household. This was important because as the wife of the principal, and as such “the mother of the folk high school”, she had to be able to run a household. Moreover, not only was she going to be mother of her own children, but also a mother to the students, who were the children of the larger home of the school. Trier was pleased to hear that Marie had learned to milk and slaughter livestock, and that she was communicating easily with peasants and humble folk. If you want to bring up others, he commented, you must not feel too grand to take the lead in the byre and at the butcher’s block. Marie liked Schrøder and his young wife, and hoped that in time she might be as competent as she was, and that Trier and she might be as loved as a couple as the Schrøders were.

Would Trier have tolerated an independent wife, as prominent as himself? Would it have threatened his manliness, his authority as a man? Marie never seems to have provoked him in any way, but in their plans for the future they seem to have found a model for their life as the leading couple of the school: one model for her and another for him. I suspect that finding solutions in practice and not through theoretical thinking was characteristic of their view of life, a view that no doubt had a spiritual quality, and yet while they knew of other people’s practices, for the most part they lived in the present and followed their own inclinations.

In the Copenhagen circles in which Trier moved it was the custom on festive occasions to propose a toast to “Woman”. Similarly at meetings at the folk high school effusive tributes were paid to “Nordic Woman”, and her praises were sung in a popular song by the “high school man” Mads Hansen that declared that she should be willing to give away the best she had for the benefit of her country. When the large Danish flag sewn by Marie for the school was hoisted for the first time, Trier, standing by the flag-pole, spoke of the importance of receiving the Dannebrog as a gift from the person you love. As he wrote, “Not until you have got your own woman,
do you realise that the woman is the heart for us.” In his letters Trier clearly set out his views on the upbringing of Danish middle-class girls. He pointed out how wrong it was for a girl to be brought up only to parade herself, and later as a married woman to be controlled by her servants - and to let a wet nurse take care of the upbringing of her children. It is a false conception “that the man only loves and favours the delicate fingers, the pure white skin, but not the heart, the deep heart of a woman, who is willing to share his grief and his joy as well as his work.”

At Askov Folk High School Marie was presented with new ideals for men and women through tales of figures from the past and not least from Nordic mythology. On 12 June 1866 she wrote to Trier about Schrøder’s readings from Grundtvig’s work on Nordic mythology *Optrin af Nordens Kæmpeliv* (Scenes from the life of Northern Warriors). It was not only the female figures who attracted the attention of young women. Marie gives an account of the heated discussion between her schoolmates over the manliness of the legendary figure of Hrodgar. Was he a weak man? In his teaching, Trier used Frigga, the wife of Odin, and the Valkyries as symbols of femininity. Frigga is the ideal woman, the good and loyal wife, strong, motherly, and self-sacrificing; the Valkyries symbolise armour-clad femininity, prepared to fight. As Trier wrote to Marie, “Well then, be my Frigga!”

A specific type of man was fashioned and held up for admiration in the folk high school milieu. The principal became an example for his students, and was by many regarded as a pioneer. He was the head of the house, he and his wife were the students’ parents, though first and foremost father-figures. Trier became one of those who shaped the figure of principal in Denmark. Charming, outgoing, loving, caring for the weak, a confessor to the sad and oppressed. This was a period much given to the excessive admiration of leaders. In spite of efforts to develop and encourage democratic ways, the social hierarchy was obvious, and the patriarchal framework into which a man was born as the head of the household and the responsible representative of the family in all dealings with the state would last until the beginning of the twentieth century. The social order was built upon men as responsible bread-winners and bearers of the burdens of the common weal. The performance of masculinities which the students at the school were to be discouraged from adopting were those of the bourgeois men, grand and indolent, and the farm-hands at the manors, coarse, irresponsible, and shallow. Trier’s students should be proud of belonging to the peasantry, firmly rooted in Danish soil. They should hold their heads high when they were faced with other young men who chose to cling to the materialism of the old peasant culture.

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64 Ibid., 201.
65 Ibid., 194.
66 Ibid., 200.
67 Ibid., 256.
68 Engberg, *Historien om Christen Kold*, 272 and 299, depicts Christen Kold as a charismatic figure with sex appeal, dangerous to young women as well as young men.
CONCLUSIONS

The principal and his students performed their new type of masculinity in accordance with their different positions in the hierarchy. Together they became pioneers, creating new models. Both the principal and the young peasant student preferred living in the countryside to life in town with its physical and spiritual pollution. Christian faith and Danish patriotism were their hallmarks. They shared a respect for the physical labour necessary in the life of a humble farmer. While the principal was a learned man, most of the young peasant students did not aspire to attain the same heights of learning. The school did not encourage further education for all. Principal and student alike shared the Christian faith as something natural, adopted voluntarily like all other values promoted by the school. Another important lesson from the school was this. When he returned home, the student should transmit what he had learned in a modest way; the former folk high school student should be ready to take the van, but was never to draw attention to himself. From the 1870s gymnastics began to leave its mark on the folk high school curriculum, and the physical rectitude acquired at school became the delight and pride of the young students.

It is safe to say that this image was accepted as the norm for young Danes from rural areas far into the twentieth century. As the working class increased in number, the differences between the young workers and the young peasants became more obvious. The peasants were characterised by their sense of nationality, the workers by their international affiliations. Yet Lutheran Christianity did not loosen its grip on the many workers who were firmly rooted in the country, even as they became town dwellers.

Did the project of creating a new Danish man succeed? Certainly the growth and popularity of the folk high schools would indicate that it was a success. The young female students have not been included in this study. At the schools they were encouraged to be independent and active, but they were not consciously prompted to rebel against traditional gender roles or seek emancipation. Later, the Grundtvigian women were to take the lead in the campaign for full civil rights for women, ultimately obtained in 1915. Only later did women understand how dangerous it might be for femininity to be idealised, for women to be put on a pedestal, high above men and masculinity.

Lutheran Christianity, and more specifically Grundtvig’s particular view of human nature, thus inspired Danish patriotism and the freedom to think and act, and all became fused in the message emerging from the Danish folk high schools. In spite of the great freedom of thought at the schools, the young students were expected to submit to the personal authority and charisma of the principal. Students arrived, supposedly willing to be shaped according to the ideals of the folk high school; it was said they returned home as new men and women, not refined, nor risen beyond their station, but spiritually elevated. Many of them joined a circle of people who had been transformed by the same experience, and some deliberately chose to live near a folk high school so that they could participate in its public meetings and thus reinforce ties and continue their personal education. Enthusiastic former students could transform a whole district, establishing new forms of social gatherings and, more importantly, new institutions such as Grundtvigian free schools for their children,
local meeting-houses and, from 1867, independent congregations with the right to choose their own minister. Likewise, many former students were instrumental in the formation of the co-operative movement that radically changed the face of Danish agriculture in the 1880s.69

Far from challenging them, the Danish folk high schools confirmed the hegemonic bourgeois gender ideals of the time, but they also contributed to the removing of walls between the old ranks and classes. Although the differences between town and country remained, the sharing of values, recovered and relaunched by the folk high school, bound Danish men and women together in a new way that transcended social class.

69 Borish, The Land of the Living, 202-204.